MESSAGES OF THE SAINTS

ST FRANCIS POVERELLO

LAURENCE HOUSMAN

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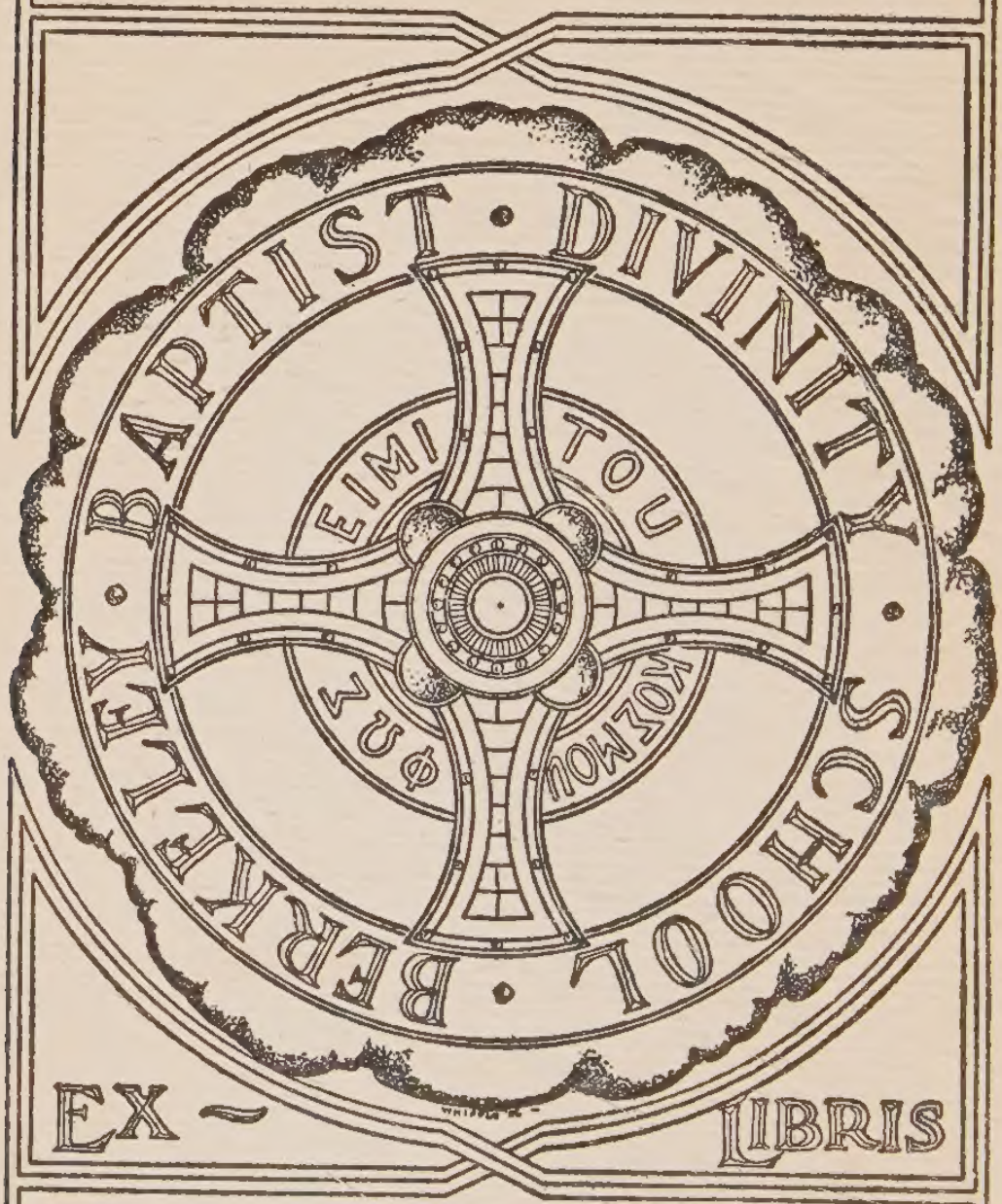

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Messages of the Saints

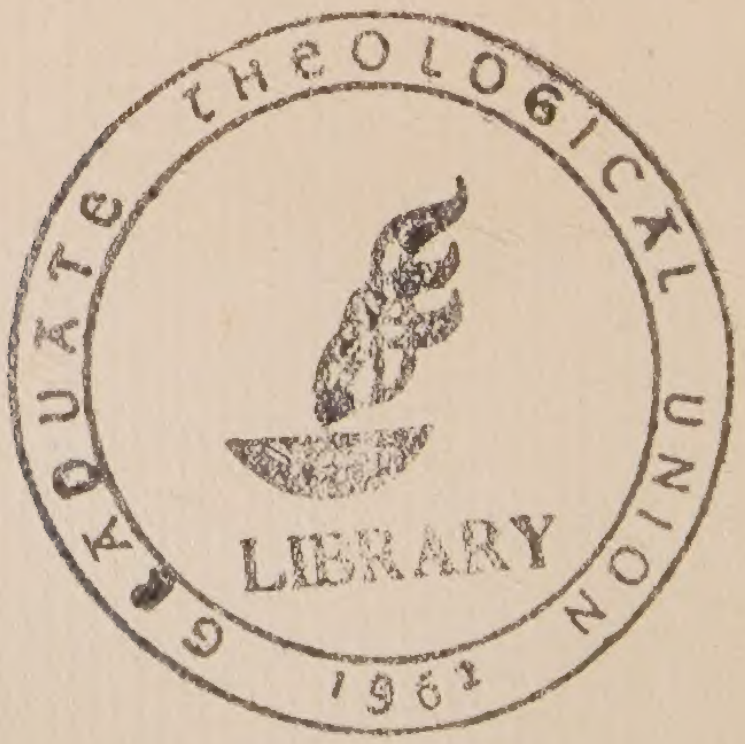
Edited by ALFRED W. POLLARD

ST FRANCIS POVERELLO

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA
By ALFRED W. POLLARD

BLESSED JOAN OF ARC
By A. MAUDE ROYDEN



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ST FRANCIS POVERELLO

BY LAURENCE HOUSMAN

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INTRODUCTION

MESSAGES OF THE SAINTS

Of all the losses to be set against the religious gains of the sixteenth century in England perhaps the heaviest was that of the saints who had striven to keep Christ's nominal followers true to His teaching since the death of the last of the little band who had listened to His words. The more the world changes the more easily men persuade themselves that, even if Christ really meant what He said, His teaching cannot be literally carried out in the conditions in which they find themselves, and the more helpful becomes the example of those who, thinking otherwise, have carried their thought into courageous action. The Church of England devotes a collect, epistle and gospel to St Simon and

St Jude; its preachers return again and again to the lessons to be learnt from the stories of Jacob and Esau, of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, of Samuel and Saul. It seems strange that it should be possible to have heard Anglican sermons for half-a-century and never one on St Francis.

Throughout the Middle Ages men and women who desired to follow as closely as they could in Christ's footsteps took the three vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. The letter of the vows was binding only on those who took them; their spirit was an ideal held up to all Christian men and women to which to reach out as best they could. Neither on Poverty, nor on Chastity, still less on Obedience, did mediævalism say the last word; nor did it attain conspicuous success in practising any one of them. But ideals which have uplifted men's hearts throughout some hundreds of years are not lightly to be cast aside, as Protestantism cast these aside in the sixteenth century. In the three short books now being issued

together, under the title *Messages of the Saints*, attempts are made to show how these ideals worked out in the lives of one man and two women in whose inspiration the common folk of their day readily believed. Two of them the Church quickly canonised; the third, whom one of her bishops had handed over to the secular arm to be burnt as a heretic, after a decent interval of some centuries she beatified.

It is not an accident that two of these saints were Italians (St Francis with some Provençal blood) and the third a Frenchwoman. Wealth, with luxury in its train, came to the cities of Northern Italy earlier than to the rest of Europe, and the scramble for it produced a very carnival of evil. France had to bear miseries only a little less great as the price of one of the earliest demonstrations that the destinies of nations cannot be satisfactorily settled by the ambitions of kings (nor even by their genealogies), and that the Divine Will was not specially concerned that they should be.

When evil riots as it rioted in Italy and France in those days, the doctrine that the daily round and common task offer all the opportunities we need appeals less than ever to the adventurous, and it is the adventurers, the saints, who came boldly to the help of their fellows in their own day, who can best help us in ours.

St Francis, St Catherine and Blessed Joan have been made the subject of many biographies, great and small. That these short sketches have been added to the total is due to a belief that these three saints are not merely good to know and admire but good to follow, and together present the old mediæval ideals in the aspect in which they may be most helpful in our own times. That they are also difficult to follow, difficult to the point of repugnance, goes without saying. Thus we Europeans hate poverty and regard a refusal to take thought for the morrow as a proof of mental weakness or wickedness; we believe, indeed, that our race has progressed in fairly precise proportion to the

development of the power and the will to think and act ahead of our daily needs. Yet it was Christ, not St Francis, who bade His disciples take no thought for the morrow, who taught them to limit their prayers for material benefits to the bread for each day's use, who told them how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

If our creeds epitomised Christ's own teaching instead of what has been thought and asserted of Him, it is this doctrine of Poverty rather than that of the manner of His Incarnation which they would emphasise. The manner of the Incarnation has its own importance, but compared with the object and aim of the Incarnation it sinks into insignificance, and with the object of the Incarnation, as we try to envisage it to-day, Christ's teaching on Poverty is surely very closely linked. If the survival of the fittest in the age-long struggle for existence suffices to make man all that God wills him to be, then there was no adequate object or aim for a divine teacher and practiser of Poverty to be born

on earth, and there is no reason to believe in such an incarnation. But if the survival of the fittest in an unending struggle is no permanent and essential principle of progress, but one destined to pass away, the stern guide to whom the Father handed us that we might be brought to Christ's school of Love, as St Paul saw that on a smaller scale the Jews were brought by their Law, then we may begin to understand why refusal to worry even about a bare ration of bread for the morrow, and something more than a dislike for riches, are among the first things we have to learn in our new school.

To be terrified of poverty means that we have no faith either in God, or in ourselves, or in our fellows. It is natural for the participators, the quiet, acquiescent participators no less than the vigorous ones, in the struggle for existence, to have this lack of faith. If at the end of lives in which we have set a high value on our personal comfort, with bodies and minds still un-

schooled, we are to be treated as we have acquiesced in hundreds of thousands of honest and hardworking men and women being treated, when they have outlived their powers of work, the prospect is not a pleasant one, and in our hearts we know that we can offer no reason to God or man why we should be treated better. So we arm ourselves with bits of paper and entries in bank-ledgers, and persuade ourselves that to the end of our days we shall still be "independent," and need the charity of none. We do wisely after our lights, and yet our caution is a confession of our sin, and the independence to which we cling a sham. For everything which has raised us above the beasts we have been dependent all our lives on our fellows, living and dead, and the things we share with the beasts, air and the earth, water and the warmth and light of the sun, we hold with them from God.

St Francis accepted his dependence wholeheartedly. He bade his followers do a day's work for a day's bread and when the bread

was denied them to beg it from others as a gift of love. History contains no record of any Franciscan who died of starvation on these terms, and it may be doubted whether any of his unaccepted followers, men and women of other creeds and in other countries who have lived by the same rule, have starved either. That the rule can thus be practised in its entirety is a great encouragement to the weaker scholars, justifies us, indeed, in believing that in the struggle for existence itself the development of unselfish love was foreordained, though it needed a divine incarnation for its emergence from its primitive narrow bonds.

There have been husbands and wives who have lived and brought up children with only infinitesimal departures from the strict Franciscan rule, but St Francis recognised that men may rightly refuse to expose those dependent on them to risks which they are willing to take for themselves. They may still follow him, if they claim no private or personal proprietorship in any-

thing they have or hold. God, they must believe, gives us all that we have that we may hallow His name with it, forward His kingdom with it, do His will with it, and help others to do the same. Whatever is necessary to keep us fit for our work we may use for ourselves; whatever is needed for those dependent on us we may use for them. If we use more for us or ours we are misapplying what God has put into our hands as a trust.

If we transpose the rule into terms of the Brotherhood of Man it comes out much the same. Human brotherhood denies the existence of any private right to spend as we please until at least the bare needs of others are satisfied. If we are stronger or cleverer than others this gives us no claim to keep more for ourselves, instead of helping the weaker and stupider as brother should help brother. If we put forth more power, we may honestly need more food to refresh us. If we think harder, we may need larger houses for the sake of quiet. But merely

for our enjoyment, we have no claim to more. It is so much more pleasant to be strong and clever than to be weak and foolish that to ask for compensation for it is absurd. It becomes worse than absurd when we remember that every quality on which we are founding such a claim comes to us, partly or wholly, as a gift from others, living or dead, and that it is only in and through fellowship with others that our own souls can progress.

The one failing which I find in St Francis is that he founded an Order to whose existence he contemplated no term. We can none of us limit the influence of our smallest action, but we need not wilfully provide for the continued working of any power we have called into being long after we can secure that it shall be used for good. St Francis was the humblest of men, the least desirous of ruling over others; there was no shadow of self-seeking in what he did, yet mistakes so innocently made as to seem almost inevitable have tragic consequences, and no one can read Mr Housman's little book without

realising how deep, from the point of view of St Francis himself, was the tragedy of his Order. That St Catherine of Siena, though she too might have founded an Order, was content with her 'famiglia,' a little company of her fellow-workers, whom at her death she dispersed, advising them as she judged best for their individual needs, is one of several reasons for connecting her with the second of the mediæval counsels, that of Chastity. For the root of Chastity is respect for the personality of others, and when individuals are reduced to units in an Order personality is apt only to be considered in so far as it conduces to what pass for the Order's interests. We have no right to sacrifice another's soul in order to carry out our ideas, however firmly we may believe that they are right. St Catherine more than once exhorted her beloved, but timid, confessor to risk martyrdom in the cause of Christendom and Italy. If the General of his Order had been in her place he might have bidden Fra Raimondo to

carry out the mission in the name of holy obedience, and the man's personality would have been wrecked.

There are two other respects in which St Catherine may help us in respect to Chastity. From her earliest womanhood she declared that she would have no husband, no betrothed, but Christ, and the central point of her doctrine was that it is only by knowledge of God, sought simultaneously with knowledge of itself, that the soul can endure and progress. Living when she did, she could not escape altogether the mediæval attitude towards marriage, and when we remember that she was one of twenty-four children borne by the same mother that attitude can hardly surprise. But she leapt instinctively at the truth that there is no such thing as a loveless chastity, that it is only a higher love that can purify our lower affections and that it is only as we advance in knowledge of ourselves and God that the width of the gulf between higher and lower becomes fully revealed.

That Joan of Arc takes her place in this triplet of books to interpret the meaning of Obedience was due to Miss Royden's expressing a readiness to write on her rather than on another saint, the sketch of whom I had asked her to undertake. The plan of our triplet had not been fully formed, and I am enough of a Quaker to have welcomed the incursion of Blessed Joan as a distinct 'leading.' For in her is typified that very highest form of Obedience which listens to the divine voice and on that initiative alone goes willingly and unhesitatingly whither it bids. Lower forms of obedience are necessary because without loyal submission to organisation common action becomes impossible, and in proportion as the common action must needs be exact and swift obedience must be correspondingly strict. But obedience which weakens individuality and destroys initiative, turning men into machines, however useful it may be at a given moment, confers efficiency at a heavy price, and the price has to be paid by him

who commands as well as by him who obeys. A low ideal of obedience, while it turns those who receive orders into machines, turns those who give them into button-pressers who tend to fly into rages if the button-pressing has not the desired effect. Tyrants make slaves, but too obedient slaves make tyrants, and both tyrants and slaves would be much better for being mere men. Worse still, there is a morbid element in both tyranny and servility which is destructive to the spiritual life. The obedience with which Joan of Arc was obedient is free from all taint of evil, and so she, with her cheery "Help yourself and God will help you," her eager "To-day rather than to-morrow; to-morrow rather than the day after," completes our trio. There is a special joy in taking the message of obedience from her example in these days when Englishmen are fighting and dying in France and for France, as well as for England and the freedom of the world. As Miss Royden has pointed out, Joan helped to save England as

well as France from the burden of impossible ambitions, which now seem to us monstrous. The English blood which has been poured out in France during the last four years has been the great reparation for England's part in the wrong done to her; but the reparation is not complete until she is loved and venerated in England as she is loved and venerated in France.

How far do the messages of these three saints cover the whole of the spiritual life? To think over the question reminds us that St Francis stood for chastity and obedience as well as for poverty, and St Catherine for poverty and obedience as well as for chastity, and Blessed Joan for poverty and chastity as well as obedience. As St Catherine tells us in her *Dialogo*, God places these and many other virtues indifferently in the souls of many creatures, "and the soul disposing herself for her chief conversation to the particular one so placed within her, draws to herself all the other virtues, which are all bound together in the affection of love."

All the lives of the saints are no more than aspects caught from the one supreme life of love, and in guiding us back to that each tells the whole tale, and enriches it in the telling by its own witness to its truth.

ALFRED W. POLLARD.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

THE life of St Francis of Assisi stands best recorded, not in books, but in the consciousness which he inspires. Legend has obscured much that he did; but his personality still tells; and one needs to be almost wilfully blind to misunderstand that great living act of faith which found fulfilment in twenty years of ministry. Whether we shape our lives in accordance with or in opposition to the ideal he stood for, our mental recognition of him cannot be in doubt. The word 'Franciscan' carries with it a clearer, a simpler, a less adulterated meaning than the word 'Christian'; and this in spite of the fact that we know hardly more about the life of St Francis than about

that of Christ. Simple credulity and calculating subtlety have alike taken hold of it, warping it to their own ends, giving to this event or to that a disproportion which tends to replace true likeness by caricature. The greatest event of his life was that he loved all men, quite a lesser one the fact, however significant, that he died bearing upon his body the marks of Christ's Passion.

That legend should have played with his name is not to be wondered at, for was he not himself the loveliest plaything the world has ever known? The beauty of St Francis moves us to smiles; the beauty of Christ brings us nearer to tears. And there is, surely, some significance in the fact that this child of laughter almost literally cried himself blind for the sufferings of Christ crucified. That was a disproportion imposed upon his mind by the form in which Christianity had found expression; yet it makes more wonderful the radiance of spiritual joy which permeated his teaching—the means by

which he strove to convey his fundamental message to humanity.

His life, so far as we know it, appears not so much a series of events as an ideal endowed by happy fortune with a personality. The bodily instrument gave it form; but even while he lived his disciples, avid for signs and wonders, seized on his flesh and blood as material for pious legend; and already in the first decade after his death the conflict of the mythologists had begun.

The Order he founded was then shaping ends other than he had intended, and, as the new formula developed, it laid secretive hold upon the various documents in which had been gathered the records of its founder. Unorthodoxy was brought sternly to book; and within forty years of his canonisation all contemporary documents had been either rewritten or suppressed.

To this end the order issued by the Chapter-General of 1264, under the presidency of Bonaventura, was precise and binding. It ordained, on holy obedience, that

all the earlier legends of the saint were to be called in, and an authorised and official biography substituted; if the brethren found any existing outside the Order they were to make away with them. When it is added that this official narrative contains no mention of St Francis's last will and testament, which under papal instruction had been then wholly set aside, it may be realised through what a barrier of pious concealment the record of his life comes down to us.

Yet through this environment of deceptive and deforming influences, the Franciscan idea triumphantly emerges and survives; and though the institution he founded failed to convey the gift he actually bestowed, he remains the most unequivocal figure of all Christian history. If ever there was a meek man upon earth it was he; and he has for his reward the spiritual possession of being understood and loved even by those who do not follow him. Many Christians can horoughly dislike St Paul, St Augustine,

St Thomas Aquinas, St Ignatius Loyola, making them responsible for the false doctrines or the harsh institutions based upon their teaching ; but it is hardly possible to conceive of a Christian disliking St Francis, or believing that anything harsh and un-Christlike emanated from him. He was an exponent of love. More imperfectly—through the theological environment of his day—but with no less sincerity, he was an exponent of joy.

Students of his life who stand outside the Roman communion may be tempted to regard as its main tragedy his loyalty to that Church which, before the breath was out of his body, started to deform the Order he had made. They would be wrong. Francis was a great reformer ; yet the very essence of the reform he came to establish lay in his buoyant acceptance of the most adverse circumstances, and his quiet indifference to customs and institutions which, with all their strength, stood up to hinder him. He did not believe in disputation or argument ; he

even preferred ignorance to learning; where love abounded he regarded knowledge as superfluous. What he did believe in was the prevailing power in this material world of a life which bore personal witness to the pattern of Christ: nothing else really mattered. In that sign he set out to conquer, and found it so sufficing that he sought no other.

The greatness of the work which by these means he came to accomplish cannot be estimated unless we know something of the conditions of his day. The Church in the thirteenth century had become the greatest of all social institutions, the most far-reaching, and, on the whole, the most powerful. By the hand of the papacy it was moulding the history of Europe; it had set in motion the Crusades; it directed and enforced the persecution and extermination of heretics; at its bidding countries were laid waste and monarchs deposed; its candidates for secular power were nearly always the successful candidates; its penal edicts against kings were obeyed by their

peoples; innocent and guilty alike, whole nations submitted to the chastisements it imposed. To its spiritual sway wealth and temporal power had been abundantly added; churches owned broad lands, bishops were feudal lords, as a prince of this world the Pope's only possible rival was the Emperor himself.

Under a direction so armed and secular in its scope Christianity had become institutional; its political accretions had greatly changed its character; evangelism had disappeared from its teaching; the formalism of tradition and ceremony had taken its place.

Had St Francis stood contentiously against those misdirecting forces his gift of love would have been wasted, his gospel would have remained unpreached, and the word 'Franciscan' would not have meant what it means to-day. His initial act of faith was to take things as he found them, to accept all hindering conditions, and so accepting them prove that the follower of Christ can remain

free. And this he did, not out of prudent calculation but by spiritual intuition.

In the transitional period, from the twelfth to the thirteenth century, society was beginning to feel its strength and to be conscious of itself in new ways and new directions. Big ideas were taking hold of men's minds, old limitations giving place to new enlargements; even geographically the world was becoming wider, and Europe for the first time an alliance of states directed toward a common end. Organised power, not merely as a conquering force, but as a solution of the social problem in a community of nations, was beginning to be tried on a grand scale.

The teaching of Francis was to be the antithesis of all this, not by active opposition but by placing in its midst a new chemic and spiritual element necessary for human salvation.

The ideal which he embodied had hitherto found no authoritative expression in the Church. Those who before his day had come

nearest were men on whom had fallen the charge of heresy. The Humiliants of Milan and the 'Poor Men of Lyons' had alike sought return to the conditions of primitive Christianity. But in their confession of faith there was also a revolt from ecclesiastical order and a denial of the efficacy of sacraments unworthily administered. The large human charity of Francis saved him from that error; the most universal of all sacraments for him was the making of man in God's image. That was the Real Presence of his life's worship, and no depth of sin or misery could turn him away from belief in its prevailing force. In the most miserable sinner he saw refuted the heresy of the Cathari concerning sacraments.

But of all forerunners the nearest to St Francis was Joachim of Fiore, at one time abbott of a Cistercian monastery, who, in the year preceding Francis's birth, had passed from office to the life of a recluse in Southern Italy. There, surrounded by a few disciples, he taught a gentle mysticism expository of

the operative functions of the Holy Trinity. From the dispensation of the Old Testament to that of the New, from the reign of the Father to the reign of the Son, the world had slowly moved; the reign of the Spirit was now at hand. From fear through faith to love; from servile through filial obedience to liberty, the soul of man was finding its way. This was his main teaching. Like Francis he enjoined an evangelical poverty; like Francis he was an imagist, a performer of parables, a lover of nature. One day as he was preaching the sky grew black with storm, the chapel darkened, thunder rolled. Suddenly the clouds dispersed; and as the sun again shone forth, Joachim, greeting it with holy salutation, led out his congregation to gaze upon the beauty of its light.

It is said that this Calabrian recluse prophesied the advent of St Francis and lived long enough to hear men speak of him. There is no suggestion that the two ever met, but the exegetical writings of Joachim were well known both then and afterwards, and

though later they were the source of much that was accounted heresy, they received during his lifetime the sanction of the Pope. It can scarcely be doubted, therefore, that Francis drew some of his inspiration from the teaching of Joachim, and that from Fiore (name symbolically chosen) sprang, in a measure at least, the life and charm of the Fioretti.

CHAPTER II

EARLY YEARS

St Francis was born at Assisi, tradition says, on the 26th of September, in or about the year 1182. His father was Pietro Bernardone, a prosperous cloth merchant; his mother, Pica, was probably of Provençal origin, a woman of great beauty and noble family. The child, born during the father's absence in France, was named by his mother, Giovanni. This was altered on Pietro's return to 'Francesco,' a name till then little known. Pietro is given credit by some for having invented it.

Pious legend recounts of the Saint's birth circumstances designed to bring it into closer conformity with the birth of Christ; miraculous incidents attend the child to the moment of his baptism and there for a time leave him. The font is still shown and the

slab marked by the knees of the mysteriously disappearing godfather. These tales, the natural outcome of the age, do no harm, since they do not, as do later emendations, affect our estimate of the Saint's work and character.

The education of Francis did not go very far: he learned to read and write; by way of accomplishment the priests of San Giorgio taught him a little Latin; the French language he learned in his own family. At the age of fourteen he was taken into his father's business; and for a time thereafter led a curiously double life, divided between trade and the pleasures of society. There are many indications that his charm of manner, together with his father's wealth, secured him admission to circles above his rank; and Pietro, well content to see his son so advanced, was not niggardly in providing the necessary means. Francis wore fine clothes, paraded in processions, led a merry life, and spent money with a lavish hand.

'Courts of Love' had become the vogue. As an opportunity for pageantry, song, and sentiment, they attracted the young gallants; and by a blend of swagger and courtly grace, quickened with touches of poetry, gave a pleasant veneer to the new code of chivalry. At these performances in his native city Francis took the lead. To do so he must have had ability, social gifts above the average, tact and a sense of humour, probably a touch of the actor. There is no doubt that he loved admiration, nor was he above boasting. When a man plays at life, to back himself for a wager is part of the game.

But while he followed pleasure and sought the approval of his fellows, deeper traits lay under his character. His mother, though grieved by the dissipation in which his days were spent, saw confidently the spiritual growth that was in him. "I am very sure," she said to those who enlarged on these youthful follies, "that when it pleases God my son will become a good Christian."

But the Christianity toward which Francis

was tending had little expression in the society of his day; it must take its shape from within; not the Church, but his own heart, was to become his instructor. To the end of his life Francis trusted to impulse, and as it characterised many of the bravest and wisest things he did, so we find it prominent in the earliest recorded sign of that change of heart which was to make him the most brotherly of men.

One day, in his father's place of business, as he attended upon certain customers, a beggar intruded, asking him for alms in God's name. In God's name Francis bade him be gone; but the next moment remorse seized him. "What should I have done," he thought, "if this man had come to me in the name of some count or baron? How much more, then, when he comes to me in the name of God?" Leaving his customers, he ran after the beggar and satisfied his need.

With a like impulsiveness he responded to the call of pleasant companions; in the easy indulgence of his affections he could not bear

to be separated from them ; and so one day, banding himself with others, took up arms and went out to fight.

It was a quarrel of no great importance, in which, as usually happens, both sides were in the wrong. Assisi was then, like most cities of its day, divided by faction ; and the small jealousies of class and class were reflected on a larger scale in the rivalry of neighbouring towns. In Assisi there was conflict between certain of the noble families and the citizens ; each had alternately robbed the other ; quite recently the citizens had taken to themselves walls, pulling down the castle of their feudal lord during his absence to provide the material. Then, feeling strong in their new defences, they proceeded to pull down other houses ; and the unpopular nobles fleeing to Perugia secured in that city an interested party to their cause.

Francis was of the people's party ; and by chance, on that occasion, some of his noble associates were the same. The citizens went out to war and were defeated ; Francis and

his friends were made prisoners; and Assisi, with no army left that could take the field, sat behind its walls and waited for the war to end.

Whether Francis made a good fighter is not known; he made an excellent prisoner. While he and his fellows lay in captivity he was the life of the party; his high spirits astonished all; he was full of future plans, and was himself the centre of them. "Some day I shall be a great prince," he said. "You will see."

A year went by. The war ended in compromise; damaged property was made good, and the people's privileges were restored. At the age of twenty-two Francis regained his freedom and returning to Assisi took up his old manner of life.

In the following year he had a severe illness. A significant incident marked the first day of his convalescence. Weak and leaning upon a stick he went outside the city walls to gaze upon the wide expanse of country lying beyond. But the lovely prospect

brought him no joy; depression of spirits, following upon illness, had thrown him out of touch with nature; something was lost—what it was, he could not explain.

Life without a satisfying motive was impossible for a man like Francis. For a while the hope that old interests would revive caused him to waver; but the mind which had touched pain and captivity needed a fresh goal for its energies.

Opportunity came to enlist his services in what seemed a larger cause—to fight, namely, the Pope's battle under Gaultier de Brienne in Southern Italy. This to his sanguine temperament opened a new prospect; it also satisfied his father's social ambition concerning him. Pietro provided an equipment more suited to the rank of a general than of a young squire, and Francis, resplendent above others, an object of envy, perhaps also of some derision, set out with elated heart upon the road which was to lead to fortune.

The sequel is as unexplained as it is abrupt.

After an absence of only a few days, having gone no farther south than Spoleto, he turned and came back to Assisi. He was no longer the same man. Whatever the cause, he now stood discredited in the eyes of his fellow-citizens: the more he had boasted of his prospects, the more hard to bear was the fact that nothing had come of them. On relinquishing the expedition he had given to a companion in arms a large part of his costly outfit, and the circumstance was not calculated to make more cordial his father's welcome of his return. Bernardone was bitterly disappointed, and from that moment dated a growing estrangement between father and son. Francis had proved himself a thoroughly bad investment.

The two years following upon this event give us little in the way of incident. An inward and spiritual conflict was taking place, conducted without witnesses; only occasionally did results show to the eyes of onlookers. Now and again old associates persuaded him back to social gaiety, but his

heart was no longer in it : more and more he withdrew himself from their midst, seeking a new outlet for his affections in large gifts of charity to the poor.

In these motions, like those of a blind man seeking to learn his way, we see the distress of a very single and honest mind undergoing its ordeal of doubt and disillusion. Without unity of purpose, life's meaning was gone ; its self-centre had given way and nothing short of a new self, whole and sane, could now satisfy him.

Not far from Assisi a cave is shown to which, according to tradition, Francis was at this time accustomed to retire for self-examination and prayer. All past days to present retrospect seemed waste ; and his penitence expressed in groans and sighs became an anguish that nothing could assuage. Life still failed to present any form or image clear enough to satisfy mind and spirit. The true source of joy, his great later discovery, was still unrevealed ; only when in passionate yearning he gave service to

the dire needs of his fellow-men did life again become real to him.

One dramatic scene, perhaps the last of the old life of gay comradeship, stands recorded. Calling to a banquet his former associates Francis once more assumed at their request his well-accustomed rôle as king of the revels. At a late hour, when mirth had become uproarious, the guests perceived that their host was missing. Search was made, and Francis, still wearing the crown and carrying the sceptre of misrule, was discovered rapt in a profound reverie. Mocking laughter greeted him. Was he in love? Was he thinking of taking a wife? "Yes," he replied, with a strange smile, "that is what I am thinking. I am thinking of taking a wife, more beautiful, more rich, more pure than any you have ever known."

Here stands delineated for the first time that ideal of poverty to which, imagist as he always was, he gave, then and afterwards, the presentment of a human form, gracious and desirable. His Lady of Poverty was to

become the key to the whole structure of his future life ; only by her aid was he to attain that perfect ideal of charity in which he stands pre-eminent. And very fitting was it that when this momentous choice of divine foolishness was made he should appear before his fellows in the garb of folly which he had voluntarily assumed to give pleasure to others. It was part of the peculiar wisdom of Francis that hereafter he was never to be afraid of looking like a fool.

The incident has a further significance : till then he had been of a divided mind : old pleasures had palled, yet in no form could he see new delight awaiting him. But for him beauty and holiness must be one—that was the crucial test ; unless holiness could come to him as a form of beauty, and a thing to desire, he could not accept it ; while that aspect was lacking his heart had no hold. And thus the image of the delectable bride gives us the clue to that turning point for which he had so long been seeking. With clarity of vision, unity of purpose was re-

stored to him ; he became a free man again. The period of indecision was over.

Having reached a conclusion he put it quickly to the test. Quitting home and acquaintance, his contemporary biographer tells us, he made a pilgrimage to Rome, and without giving a thought to the means by which he was to return, emptied his purse upon St Peter's tomb. But the experiment was not to end there. Francis was delicate and fastidious by nature, and though with the optimism of youth he might have easy faith as to his future means of livelihood, there was first a more personal and immediate test to be undergone. Exchanging his clothes for a beggar's rags, he stood a whole day among the mendicants crowding the steps of the basilica, and asked alms from passers-by. Thus, gazing up to her from below, he saw for the first time the seamier side of 'Sister Charity,' and realised in his own person that dependence on the good will of others which formed the whole outlook of so many of his fellow-creatures.

His return home was followed by a test yet more severe; and for a moment he quailed. Francis had a deep and uncontrollable repulsion from the sight of leprosy, and did all he could to avoid it. One day as he rode along a narrow track he came unexpectedly upon a leper: instinctively he turned his horse and rode off. But facts had always a way of staring Francis in the face; incapable of subterfuge he was never able to get round them. Before he had gone far his flight from the presence of this leper smote his conscience; he overcame his qualms, and turned back again. Leaping from his horse he greeted the sick man with gentle salutation and reverently kissing his hand gave him all the money he possessed.

It marked a new advance; the old fear and horror had disappeared; compassion for the sufferings of others thrilled him with a sense of joy. A few days later he visited the lazaretto in which a large number of these unfortunate sufferers were confined. Their amazement at such a visitation from one still

wearing the marks of his rank must have been very great. Such a thing had never happened before, their tongues stumbled, they wept striving to express their gratitude.

For Francis, also, it was a great event: the last of all social and physical barriers was down; by way of the lepers all the griefs and miseries of the world lay open to him; sorrow made way for joy; and in reaching to succour the lowest of God's creatures he found his hands resting confidently upon the feet of Christ.

CHAPTER III

STAGES OF GROWTH

FRANCIS'S spiritual finding of himself was by a process unusual for his time. It was a work of singular initiative, originality and independence. The Church was a very great institution, and her claim to power and authority as the director of men's souls was not less exalted then than now. Her whole attitude toward the laity was that of a mother toward children whom she had done little to instruct, but of whom she required in all spiritual matters a submission and dependence that had no bounds.

But the illumination of St Francis came direct, as individual in its operation as the many recorded conversions of struggling souls in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—men out of touch with the ecclesiastical order of their time. The

Roman Church had done more to obscure than to reveal that poignant vision of divine love toward which the soul of St Francis expanded and lifted itself for union that became an embrace. Even the art which adorned her altars seemed to repel as an undue familiarity, almost as an irreverence, the humanising touch by which he strove to communicate Christ's love to the hearts of men.

It is hard to realise now, with all the intervening art of the early Renaissance so deeply affected by Franciscan feeling, what a revolution he actually wrought. The fixture of Church ceremony and the cryptic stewarding of the gospel message had imposed on mural painting and mosaic an awful formality which no individual artist had dared to disturb; stern dogma forced its rule upon design, in every altar-piece the Holy Child stood central, monstrant against His Mother's breast, — no other position was deemed orthodox; even in the shifting of a limb, or the wrong flexing of a finger, might lurk an

implication of heresy. Byzantine art, the source from which these features derived, has many noble and splendid qualities; it inspires awe, reverence, fear, but it does not inspire love; nor in the cold and aloof faces of its deities and saints is there any reminder of a God, compassionate sharer of man's grief and pain, preferring mercy to judgment. If the change brought about by St Francis could be summed up in a phrase, it might be said that he made Christ not merely human but native to all countries in Christendom. That, at least, was a part of it; and this establishment of an inter-racial bond, so like in character to the gift of Pentecost, became reflected in the instinctively native aspect which Christian art acquired under the Renaissance.

The infinite variety, the playfulness and grace through which, in the domain of art, the new humanism found later expression, were but the counterpart of that humanism of St Francis in things spiritual, which had gone before to prepare the way. Under an

ecclesiastical rule of twelve centuries Christianity had become institutional. Francis was the evangelist of a new individualism; and this not the less truly because the individuality which he sought to express was that of Christ. It was a great adventure: he had found it so in his own soul; it was a greater still when he set out to pursue it in the souls of others.

The relations of Francis to the Church in the days preceding his conversion have left no distinctive feature in the records which survive; such motions as he felt toward a spiritual life seem to have taken him only in the direction of charity. But his pilgrimage to Rome indicates that there, at least, he hoped to find a fuller source of illumination for the new path he had chosen. It would be wrong, therefore, to suggest that his individualism implied any breaking away from spiritual authority. Submission to Church rule accompanied his search for freedom, and his reverence for the priestly office, even in those of notorious character.

found expression, as will be seen later, in the first rules of the Order.

Francis's first visit to the lepers must have taken place somewhere in the year 1206. He was then twenty-four years of age, and still living under the parental roof. And here, for the last time, we see him hesitate, showing in regard to home relations a touch of timidity and cowardice almost out of character. Whether or no Bernardone actually knew what had been taking place is not certain; but he already knew enough of his son's tendencies, and his disappointment and vexation were great. He knew that the money which Francis had previously spent in ways socially profitable was now as lavishly given where it could bring no return —that he no longer helped him in his business or brought rich customers to his door. Domestic relations became strained.

The problem they presented was more difficult than any which Francis had yet faced, for now he was causing pain, not to himself, but to others, and in a direction

where much was owing. His relations with his mother had been close and tender; his father, in all worldly ways, had been generous and indulgent; and now when he looked, as he had some right to look, for a return in kind, it was denied him. Francis had wasted the merchant's substance to no purpose; the parental charge of ingratitude levelled against him had some colour, and it was hard to bear.

For a while he does not seem to have faced it. He ran away, temporised, sought advice in directions that were hopeless, went and talked to the bishop, and came away feeling a fool. With better results he attended Mass at the little neglected church of St Damien, lying outside the walls, served by a single priest, and for lack of alms or endowment fast falling into ruin. Here, in the church itself, he met again his Lady of Poverty, and more clearly than before heard and responded to her call. The poverty of the small sanctuary was like that of the outcast and the forsaken; it was something

he could help, something in plain need of simple and direct service.

The little painted crucifix of the chapel before which he so often knelt and prayed is still preserved, precious as the instrument through which, with his keen, visualising sense, sharpened by suffering, he was finally drawn to the last and most difficult act of renunciation. Often has the same thing happened in the lives of saints; and we have no need to regard as miracle a state of ecstasy which lifts the mind from its material surroundings. Before the eyes of Francis the crucified form took on life, and in answer to his prayer a voice spoke. The words of the prayer stand recorded: "Great and glorious God, and thou, Lord Jesus, shed Thy light, I beseech Thee, into the darkness of my mind; and so be found in me that I may do all things according to Thy holy will."

The prayer was answered. Doubt and indecision left him; his natural faculty for relating word and thought to deed was restored. Without further hesitation he

hastened home, loaded his horse with all the bales of merchandise that he possessed, and set out for the neighbouring town of Foligno. Having there disposed not only of his goods but his horse as well, he returned on foot to the chapel of St Damien, and offered the priest the proceeds of the sale. The latter demurred. Francis threw the money into a recess and there left it.

But though he had acted with so much decision and on as large a scale as means allowed, Francis greatly dreaded the consequences. Fearing his father far more than he had feared the lepers, he kept out of his way, even ran off and hid himself when Bernardone, puzzled by his long absence, came with others in search of him. Francis, however, though lacking courage, now knew that he had done well, and while he still trembled his heart rejoiced. Before long, concealment and a good conscience became incompatible; after a six weeks' absence he returned home to face his father's wrath.

On his entry into the city, unshorn, starven,

and clothed like a beggar, shouts of derision greeted him; everyone believed him to be mad. Bernardone, looking out to learn the cause of the disturbance, saw his son the butt and laughing-stock of a jeering crowd. The spectacle may have been designed to prepare him gently for the revelations which were to follow; it only added to his wrath. Francis rendered account of the horse and the missing merchandise with so much simplicity and satisfaction that Bernardone straightway put him under lock and key, as no longer accountable for his actions.

A few days later, while Pietro was away, Pica the mother let him out again. Francis went back to St Damien. Pietro returned and beat Pica for interfering, then following his son to his new retreat once more claimed the custody of him. Francis refused to go, but tried to secure peace by offering his father all the sale money which still lay unappropriated in the chapel. This, however, did not satisfy Bernardone. To protect his estate from so ill-balanced a mind he haled

his son, first before the civil then the ecclesiastical tribunal, calling upon him to renounce all claim of filial inheritance.

When the matter was thus made public Francis's way was easy. Though he could not do well in argument he could, by an act, make himself understood. He appeared before the bishop's court; the case had aroused much popular interest, and the place was thronged. Bernardone presented his petition; his grievances were many and great; there was no defence, and the bishop advised Francis to give up claim to any share in his father's property.

Francis did not immediately reply; retiring to another chamber, he stripped himself of all his clothes, and on his return laid them with such money as still remained to him at the bishop's feet.

"Listen, all of you," he said, "and understand. Till now I have called Pietro Bernardone my father. To him, who with so much trouble gave me this money and raiment, I now return them. Henceforth I

have no desire but to serve God and to say, 'Our Father who art in heaven.' "

A murmur of wonder rose from the crowd. Bernardone, unmoved by the demonstration, gathered up his restored property and withdrew; the bishop (the ecclesiastical chronicler informs us) covered Francis with his mantle and caused other clothes to be provided for him. The defendant had won —not his case, it did not exist for him—but the understanding of his hearers.

The scene belongs to another age, and to a race different from our own. Its details have received pious embellishment, and in modern ears it may well sound crude, almost foolish; yet if it really told as it was meant to do, how can we judge adversely the means employed? To Francis at least it brought peace and contentment at a time of sore need; and the incidents immediately following speak with a strange eloquence of the elation of spirit which came after.

From that scene of public avowal he disappeared for some weeks. Record has it

that he wandered in the wilds, living from day to day at the direction of chance, making no provision, enduring hunger and cold, always singing, confirming his faith in the new freedom that he had found. One day he fell into the hands of robbers. "Who are you?" they asked. "I am the herald of the great King," he replied. Snow lay on the ground; in mockery they stripped him and left him to die. Shivering with cold, but with happiness undiminished he sought at a neighbouring monastery, in return for service, a cloak to cover him, but received nothing. At Spoleto an unknown friend gave him a tunic. It was early spring. On his way back to St Damien he stopped at the house of the lepers, and there, in devoted ministry to their needs, gave thanks for all the benefits that he had received. Now for the first time possessing nothing, Francis felt himself rich.

It was approaching summer when he returned again to St Damien. There, too, he had a task awaiting him. The church was

in need of repair; since no other hands offered he would do it himself. He went down to Assisi, stood in the market-place and at street corners, sang till he had drawn a crowd, then begged stones for the repairing of the chapel. In the quarries and where walls were building he made the same request. People laughed, but still they gave to him; men were curious to see what he would do. He was thought to be mad; he knew himself to be very sane; for now and always with a mild and patient courage he trusted the goodness of his fellow-men.

In the world, which humility had made so strangely his, work was waiting to be done; work which he like others had been blind to, but of which a single showing was surely enough. Why wait, therefore, to exhort and organise others for a duty common to all? He went and did it himself; he did not mind looking a fool. The task was infinitely too much for one, but the more it overburdened him the more he bore witness by his own insufficiency to the greatness of the need. So

men were to see him day by day carrying stones to the rebuilding of the church for which others had ceased to care. And everyone who met him saw him doing, not grudgingly or with complaint but with a strange look of joy, tasks which he had not strength for, incumbent upon all. Very gently and humbly he shamed men with the brotherhood they wished to forget.

It is not swords but ideas which work revolutions. And if only the idea be true enough in its bearing upon life, it needs no weapons for its advance and no walls for its protection, but is as ripe seed lightly lifted from its stem, to be borne of the wind this way and that into a waiting and fertilising world.

CHAPTER IV

THE FOUNDING OF THE BROTHERHOOD

The Franciscan Brotherhood grew out of very simple beginnings. Kindred spirits were drawn by the example of Francis till they became a community. But the strange manner of his life did not bring them all at once: many scoffed, a few pitied and wondered; most people still thought him mad, and he went his way alone.

The second year of his labours saw the completion of the restoration of St Damien. From that he went on to the repair of other churches—the small chapel of the Portiuncula, afterwards so famous, being the third.

Hitherto the call to preach had not come to him. History tells with particularity of date and circumstance how it took place. The Portiuncula, known also as Saint Mary of the Angels, belonged to the Benedictines

but had fallen into disuse; after its restoration by Francis a priest came occasionally to say Mass. On the feast of St Matthias, in February, 1209, Francis was there assisting alone. When the priest read the words of the gospel they seemed addressed to him, personally; and whether for that reason, or because he had never heard them before, they came upon him like a revelation. He heard the voice of Christ Himself saying to him: "Go preach, saying: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, nor shoes, nor staff; for the workman is worthy of his meat.'"

So much of this had already become his rule, what wonder if his heart leapt with joy and thankfulness at hearing its sanction given as a command. It came as a release for aspirations and energies which as yet had not found scope. The next day he went to

Assisi and started preaching. Thus began his apostolate.

The sound of his voice drew attention: his words were very simple, but his manner was not like that of other preachers, and his message was not the same. Hearts that heard him were moved.

The first of whom we have record was Bernard of Quintavalle, a man of wealth, one of his former associates, with whom he had lived on terms of intimacy. Bernard, after hearing him, invited Francis, as in former times, to share his chamber for the night; and from the conference which there ensued found better understanding. The next day, accompanied by another friend, a lay canon named Pietro, they attended Mass, seeking in the book of the gospels particular guidance for the course they were to follow. Three times the book opened on the charge of apostolic poverty given by Christ to His disciples, and the text there revealed was adopted as the first rule of the Brotherhood. Thereupon the two friends determined to

join Francis in his life of service and poverty, and Bernard began forthwith to dispose of and distribute all his property to the poor. The story goes that a priest named Silvester, who had previously sold stone to Francis at a low price, hearing that money was going, came to require better payment. Francis, with careless indifference, gave to him in handfuls, over and above his demand, asking if he still wanted more. The reproach went home, and the ashamed and contrite Silvester became, not long afterwards, one of his followers.

His third adherent came earlier—a youth named Gilles, or Egidius, also a former companion, one in whom his new mode of life had first roused mockery. Of this disciple many beautiful stories are told; his spirit was intuitively Franciscan, and he became, because of it, one of the saint's closest intimates.

Under the walls of Portiuncula the newly formed band of brothers built themselves huts of branches. They put on the peasant's tunic and the cord which Francis had already

assumed, and with no further preparation set out to offer their services to men and preach. Up and down the country they went; people began to hear of them.

The Lord's Players (*joculatores Domini*) was the name they were first known by; perhaps it was not of their own choosing, but they accepted it very willingly; it gave something of their true character. These strange lay preachers, so unpriestly in their bearing and so uncouthly garbed, carrying their message without licence or authority, sharing the field work of labourers and preaching only when work was done, may well have struck conventional minds with a sense of irreverence. Their poverty was undignified, their eloquence lacked discipline; when asked to what order they belonged they replied: "We are the poor penitents of Assisi." The name savoured of heresy.

The Bishop of Assisi sent for Francis and reproached him: in the main he based his objection on the extreme rigour of their poverty; such a rule, he said, was too

harsh and difficult for human nature to endure.

"If we had possessions," replied Francis, "we should need also arms to defend them: for thence come quarrels and lawsuits, and out of these war and oppression hurtful to the love of God and of one's neighbour. And that is why in this world we do not wish to possess anything." The bishop did all he could to persuade them to take orders or enter a house of religion; but it was not to be. Francis had received his orders direct; his house of religion was the world.

In these early days the Brotherhood, unknown and without credentials, encountered a good deal of suspicion and persecution. In some of the towns they entered people threw mud, attacked and insulted them, and tore off their clothing. The simple, wise brothers took it all smiling, as something to the good; these things only made them happier, not from a perverse love of pain, but because thus they could bring men more quickly to a better understanding. "By

your example more than by your words." Francis said to them, " you shall bring hearts to repentance ; and you will find men, full of faith, gentleness, and goodness, who will receive you and your words with joy."

This first mission lasted nearly a year. On their return to Portiuncula they were joined by four others, of whom little is known beyond their names. A second mission was undertaken covering more ground ; it produced more opposition but also larger results : people were beginning to understand them. After this mission four more joined the Brotherhood ; these included Silvester, the priest already mentioned, and Angelo Tancredi, a knight of noble family.

It was now that Francis drew up the first rule and gave the Brotherhood its name. The document no longer exists, but its practical lines have already been indicated. These Little Brothers or " Minori " (the name then borne by people of the lowest rank) had very little of the mendicant about them ; service freely rendered was the

practice of the Brotherhood; surrendering everything they became, without payment, servants of all. Poverty, chastity, and obedience were the accompanying conditions.

It was a profession of humility safeguarded from insincerity by the hard labour which it entailed. Francis enjoined on his followers to work for a living, but to ask no wages—only their daily bread and a night's lodging. If these were refused they were not to withdraw their services, but for their necessities seek help in charity. The mendicancy, in this form, permitted to the Brotherhood, became in later days its prevailing feature. Francis had by no means so intended. He himself, when not otherwise employed, took up the work of a woodcarver, and the small group of rudely constructed huts which grew up under the walls of Portiuncula was, in those early days, far more like a workers' settlement than a monastery. Those not employed on crafts of their own choosing went out and gave their service wherever required,

more especially to the sick and the poor, or the repairing of ruined churches. And side by side with these activities went the visitation of lepers and the preaching of the gospel.

Like everything else which Francis devised, it was a demonstration, an example easy to understand, something above argument. Love expressed in fellow-service was too good a commodity for men, seeing it, not to welcome and find a place for it in their midst. In that faith and by those simple means, Francis set out to invade the whole order of society.

It was an act of spiritual generalship which till then had had no parallel ; by all the rules it was ridiculous, but so long as the rules were whole-heartedly broken it succeeded wonderfully. Could the spirit of St Francis have reproduced itself with entirety in every community which bore his name, it would have conquered the world. Even in the partial success, which to devout followers has sometimes looked so like failure, it marks an epoch ; and from his teaching dates, how-

ever falteringly expressed in deed, a new consciousness in the Christian world that the Kingdom of God can only come through the healing on earth of the wounds inflicted by man on man.

In nothing was the Franciscan spirit more marked than in his treatment of the lepers. Hitherto men had been taught to regard them as the embodiment on earth of God's punishment for sin. On Francis's showing they became the greatest opportunity afforded to man for the strengthening of brotherhood, and the repayment of divine love. The Church and Society alike had done all they could to emphasise the horror of the disease: lepers had no civil rights; they could not make wills or hold property: in all practical ways they led an aimless, excommunicated, and degraded life. Even a pious benefactor wrote of them: "Seeing that among all infirmities leprosy is more disgusting than any other, those who are visited with this disease ought to present themselves in more humble garb and gesture, as more

contemptible and debased than all other men." And thereupon he quotes Scripture to prove his point. Francis will have none of it; he charges the sin on himself. "When I was in the bondage of sin," he tells us, "it was bitter and loathsome to me to look upon persons afflicted with leprosy; but after my blessed Lord had brought me among them to work mercy on them, when I departed thence what had before seemed bitter and loathsome became changed to me into great sweetness and comfort, both of soul and body."

It is the difference between light and darkness, and of that brief passage no word is more significant than the last. In St Francis, body and soul became one as an instrument of divine love; and whatever his soul found will to do gave sweetness and contentment to his body also.

In the summer of the year 1210, with a written rule and disciples numbering twelve, Francis decided to go to Rome and obtain the approval of the Pope. The more definite

form which the Brotherhood had now assumed made its continued lack of authorisation more marked, and may have increased the opposition which in many places it continued to encounter. Though rules and formalities troubled him but little, Francis was a man of courtesy ; he held the priestly office in high reverence, and so when any priest objected to their preaching within his district he strictly enjoined upon the brethren to submit and go elsewhere. Thus his work often suffered a hindrance.

The attitude of Francis toward Church authority seems to have been this : he accepted it with loyal submission and devotion, yet remained curiously independent. To the Pope as his spiritual head he bowed in the deepest reverence ; as a dispenser of favours and privileges he preferred to be free from him. The Holy See was one thing, the Court of Rome quite another ; with the subtleties of the latter he wished not to be entangled.

The literal acceptance by Francis of the

gospel teaching of love and peace and poverty was absolute. It covered everything. He could not, therefore, regard with approval the Church's assumption of worldly power, its acquisition of wealth, or its incitement to war. But just as he trusted human nature however imperfect to recognise, when shown, the pattern of Christ, so also, in spite of her great possessions, he trusted his Mother Church. His mission was not to dispute but to demonstrate; and if by her authority she imposed upon him any administrative rule he accepted the burden, and went on his way undisturbed. The policy of Rome presented many hindrances, but in his scheme of peaceful penetration St Paul's great saying served as his guide: "Love, joy, gentleness, peace: against these there is no law." In the glorious liberty of that gospel he carried through a reformation which, conducted on more contentious lines, must certainly have failed.

The throne of St Peter was then occupied by Innocent III., a man of remarkable char-

acter, clean, upright, and a great statesman. But though he ranks very high in the long line of popes, he represented a school of thought which was the antithesis to that of St Francis; under his sway the Church had become more political, more contentious and more persecuting than ever; he stood, not for love, but for power, and he stood for it very successfully.

Francis and his twelve on their arrival in Rome experienced at first all those delays and difficulties which officialism loves to interpose: he was unable to obtain audience. Having waited for a reasonable time, he walked in without permission, and presented himself with the deepest respect but unannounced; and the Pope ordered him out again.

But the sight of Francis and his gaunt band of followers had done its work: the Pope could not get them out of his head; he dreamed about them, and then began to inquire who they were. Guido, Bishop of Assisi, chanced to be at Rome at that time:

he spoke for them, perhaps not very enthusiastically, but secured them an audience. Innocent having heard their petition advised them to give up their life of poverty, and sent them away to think about it. A few days later they returned with convictions unchanged. Francis in a spoken parable gently reproached the Pope for the hindrances raised by the Church to a life of gospel poverty ; and Innocent, admiring his boldness, ratified the rule and gave them the desired permission to preach. The Franciscan Brotherhood, with all its unconventional observances, was received and recognised.

CHAPTER V

THE RULE OF POVERTY

BEFORE the Pope's sanction of the Brotherhood a consistory had been held. Many of the cardinals opposed the Franciscan rule as a dangerous innovation, also as being impossible of human fulfilment. One cardinal alone supported it. "If we hold," said he, "that to observe gospel perfection and make a profession of it is impossible and irrational, do we not blaspheme Christ, the author of the gospel?" His word seems to have carried weight with Innocent, to the extent at least of allowing the experiment to be made.

The Brotherhood, now regularised, made their first essay at Rivo Torto, some four miles from Assisi, in a ruinous building formerly a lepers' hospital. Here under Mount Subasio they found water, peaceful

solitude, and cover for shelter and retirement. From this convenient centre they went forth to conduct their missions in Assisi and the adjoining districts. "Let us keep a great heart in a little house," said Francis, as he assigned the brothers their resting-place.

The news that the Franciscan rule had received the approbation of Rome caused a great stir. Popular feeling turned emotionally toward the new preachers, and the clergy were impelled to admit Francis first to the church of San Giorgio, then to the cathedral.

His success was very great: after centuries of formal discourse the world was ripe for the spoken word uttered with fire and conviction. The burning message of St Francis was fanned by the breath of popular applause: people could hardly believe their ears; he preached a new gospel. All Umbria cried out to hear him, and many new brethren joined the Brotherhood. Among these were several who afterwards became famous: John, the peasant; Juniper, the guileless humorist; Masseo and Rufino, men of birth

and distinction ; Brother Leo, a young priest, the best beloved and the most ideally faithful of all his followers, destined within two years of his master's death to suffer scourging by order of the Minister-General for his too strict adherence to the rule of poverty.

While the fame of Francis thus mounted, bearing down all opposition, the brethren, put to the test of their principles, became homeless and without a roof to cover them. One day as they were at prayer a peasant, jealous of their continued occupancy of the ruin in which he had sometimes stabled his ass, drove the beast into their midst. "Get in, get in!" he cried; "make yourself at home with them!"

Francis and his brethren without dispute made way for brother ass and retired to the surrounding caves. Before long their plight became known to the Benedictines of Mount Subasio, and the monks with all good will made them a present of the little chapel of the Portiuncula where at first they had found shelter. Here they built themselves wooden

huts and planted a hedge, and in this form for ten years it remained their convent.

During this period the ideal of St Francis finds its most perfect expression. We see the brethren going forth by turns to preach and to tend the lepers: they work in the vineyards and in the olive harvest; they make baskets, fell timber, carry loads of wood; some are even found in domestic service; delightful Brother Juniper is a shoemaker. But for these things they take no payment; the obedience they have vowed means service; they live to be the helpers of men, and a pattern before the eyes of all of the love and humility of Christ.

On that simple basis of peace and good will to all Francis was enabled to do his native city a great service. The feuds of the nobles and the popular party had revived and become acute: Francis was called in to mend matters. The document by which agreement was reached still exists; it defines and reduces to a yearly payment the feudal rights of the nobles; it establishes demo-

cratic control over all treaties and alliances, and it decrees the enfranchisement of the serfs.

The unpractical idealist, whose motives nobody could distrust, had become a political power! Had the great ones of the earth granted him free way, had his disciples conformed more closely to his pattern, he might, even in his own lifetime, have become an international one, changing the whole direction of the statecraft of Christendom.

But the tremendous success of the Franciscan movement in the first ten years of its existence made the Court of Rome eager to lay hands on so great an organisation for its own ends, and to remove from it any suggested reflection on the temporal means chosen by the Church for the advancement of the spiritual power. With a like deflection of purpose the missionary zeal of St Francis's own followers lacked too often the sweet reasonableness and courtesy which distinguished his dealings with all infidels and sinners. Francis neither pestered nor

persecuted ; he showed the world almost for the first time that it was possible to be a Christian without compromise, in a considerate and a gentlemanly manner. This is shown if we look ahead and compare the missionary efforts of his followers among the Saracens in Morocco with his own mission to the Soldan. The former met the kindly forbearance shown to them by the Moslem authorities with an indecent pestering for martyrdom which finally had its reward. St Francis, on the other hand, performed his task with the gentle dignity of an ambassador who offers peace without threatening war. When his plea failed he accepted his dismissal, parting from his opponent with mutual liking and respect. To accept martyrdom is one thing, not inconsistent with the professions of a peace-maker ; to drive one's adversary into inflicting it is to poison his blood and arouse in his breast all the evil passions of war. That was a course which Francis, opposed to all hatred and strife, could never follow : it was not his way.

The failure of the growing Franciscan Brotherhood to maintain without increase of fixed rule and discipline the light, almost intangible bond of unity which characterised its beginnings was due mainly to the world's lack at that time of a sufficient number of men in the likeness of St Francis to make a central organisation superfluous. But the Franciscan ideal is with us still; it is only seven hundred years old, and the end is not yet.

The first Chapter-General of the Brotherhood, while its extension was yet limited to the towns of middle Italy—as also the second and the third (which took place in or about the year 1213)—had all the characteristics of a large family gathering. Held twice a year, they provided for the reunion and familiar intercourse of friends personally very dear to each other. These were mostly young men drawn from all classes, differing greatly in character, but closely bound by a common love for their father and founder, and up to that time very obedient and

sponsive to his instructions. A life of practical utility and service was still incumbent upon all, and we read that about this time Francis expelled from the community a certain brother who wished only to pray and would not work : he could go and pray outside. Many thousands have gone since then to pray outside the intentions of their founder, but still call themselves Franciscans, and the Order retains them.

In 1216 a chapter was held for the organisation of missions to foreign countries. The Pope was then urging a continuation of the crusade for the recovery of the Holy Places by force of arms. To Francis this seemed a great sin. We see now plainly enough its un-Christian origin and character. It had arisen because Christian pilgrims visiting the Holy Land and there suffering ill treatment had preferred to the example of Christ that of St Paul, who, to escape a scourging, had appealed to Cæsar and the secular arm, invoking the privileges of a Roman citizen. To this reversal of the teaching of Calvary

the Church was committed by the Papal authority and has remained committed to it ever since. All over the world, all down the ages, Christian states have made use of the grievances of their missionaries to dispossess, subjugate, and exploit other nations.

Francis had no call to contend with temporal powers ; his way was pre-eminently the way of peace. But when assigning to others their mission in various fields, he chose for himself Egypt and Palestine, where the hosts of the two rival religions stood confronted. Shipwreck and other adverse circumstances delayed fulfilment for three years. He spent the intervening time on an evangelising mission first in central Italy, then in Spain, through which country he had hoped—more direct ways failing—to get into touch with the Saracens. Severe illness forced him to return to Italy without having carried through that further project ; and we know little about the character of the work which he accomplished in Spain. The tradition that he there founded a hundred

monasteries is the product of a later time, when this building-up of institutions had changed from its open-air freedom and nomadic ease the whole character of the Order.

Not till the year 1219 did Francis set foot in Egypt. The crusading army, under Jean de Brienne, was then lying before Damietta, in the sort of stalemate position to which after seventy years of misdirected effort the cause had been reduced. Francis seems to have addressed his message of peace not to one side only: for which reason he was probably looked upon as "pro-Moslem" by those —and they were many—who regarded the crusade as a righteous and divinely inspired cause. It was with great difficulty that he obtained permission from the papal legate to pass into the camp of the infidel.

Francis, accompanied by Illuminato, one of the brethren, was led bound by chains into the presence of the Soldan. Asked what he had come for, Francis said to deliver God's message and to save a soul from damnation.

The Soldan replied that he was not himself an expert in matters of religion, and referred him to those who were. Having called these into consultation, he asked what according to law ought he to do with Francis. They replied that to stop him preaching he must cut off his head. The Soldan then said to Francis: "The law of my religion bids me cut off your head to prevent your preaching. But since you came to do me a good service I will disobey the law and let you go."

Thus, if Francis failed to make the Soldan a Christian, he succeeded in making him a more human Moslem. After a second interview, in which he deeply impressed the Soldan with his sincerity and courage, the latter dismissed him with all honour, offering him also presents, which Francis would not accept.

His mission was bound to fail under the circumstances, for the message he came to deliver was incompatible with the contemporary attitude of Christendom; and though the Soldan saw that he was a holy man, he

saw also that he was not a representative Christian. Europe was seeking to exterminate in the name of religion a civilisation in many respects higher than its own, and even had the Pope wished to rescind his sanction there was now no drawing back; militarism had converted a wrong locally committed into a menace to all western civilisation. In the long run this application of the sword to an ideal cause ended (as it always must) in conspicuous failure. The crusades, while totally failing in their initial aim—the permanent recovery of the Holy Places—made wide and final, after the taking of Constantinople, the breach between the churches of East and West; and the Holy Roman Empire—which in its inception had aimed at the union of might with right for the settlement of international differences—though sometimes the champion of just causes, ended by leaving Europe as disunited as it found it.

Set against this the ideal of internationalism which underlies the original scheme and

rule of St Francis. Its spiritual source was a new conception of divine love as expressed in the person of Christ : its instrument was poverty.

It has already been said that one effect of St Francis's teaching was to make Christ seem native to all lands and races. But to be native alone was not enough. If to the Italian He became Italian only, then, like the Hebrew Jehovah, He was but the racial deity of a chosen people. If, on the other hand, this close and intimate bond was shared by all, it carried with it a further implication out of which a universal brotherhood must spring. For it is impossible to see Christ as St Francis saw Him, and allow thereafter any national barriers to stand between us and others. St Francis taught us that we cannot limit our sense of brotherhood among men without limiting also our sense of the brotherhood of Christ ; that we cannot loosen the bonds of love which should bind the whole human family in one without crucifying Him afresh ; that we cannot wish ill to

any nation without wishing ill to Him. This conception forms the ground for the true international; and the moral difficulty for Christians when they go to war is that they do it not mainly—in some cases hardly at all—in order by terrible discipline to do good to the bodies and souls of their enemies, but mainly, and sometimes exclusively, to secure good for themselves and their allies. It is easy enough to say: "Our victory will benefit the whole world"; but they are not shedding blood to ensure with certainty that the benefit shall be equal.

Francis definitely believed that wars arose out of men's jealous insistence on the rights of property; and he believed quite as definitely that those who gave up all rights and all property could live useful and joyous lives in the service of their fellow-men. He believed that they could make themselves so welcome to the human race that they would run no danger of extinction as a community, and less danger as individuals, than those who carried and used arms to defend their possessions.

That was his belief. How was he to apply it without the upheaval and overthrow of the existing fabric of society? Quite simply, quite clearly, by letting his light shine. His light was the Franciscan Brotherhood.

On that Brotherhood he built his hopes of permeating the whole world, without revolutionary disturbance, with an example of the social love of man for man bearing fruit in joy. But the only way to attain that end with certainty and to demonstrate beyond all question the safety of God's "little sheep," even in the midst of wolves, was that those who followed him, whether as individuals or in their corporate capacity, should possess nothing—not even a roof to cover them. "Possess nothing!" he cried to his followers; and knowing well how tempters can deceive, he was definite and insistent against the high motives which would be employed to mislead them. Neither for the glory of God, nor the furtherance of their service to men, were they to

possess houses, or land, or money. They were to occupy ruined churches, premises which had passed from use or were freely lent to them, and even these they were to vacate if so bidden by any ill-disposed person with whom they might come in contact. The absolute insecurity of their tenure was to be the demonstration of their faith. By their imitation of Christ they were to conquer the hearts of men.

It was a new political economy, a strange blend of wisdom and simpleness which had never yet been tried. To be whole-heartedly social, yet entirely unworldly ; to be given up to the service of men, yet to stand free from all entanglement in schemes of material recompense and reward ; to turn to foolishness the law of supply and demand by giving without stint and demanding nothing in return ; to stand counter to the law of competition and yet to labour, indifferent to the struggle for survival and yet to survive, and to do all these things not with meekness only but with joy, not from a perverted lust for

self-mortification but from a faith that out of life so lived joy would spontaneously arise —in a word, by the example of love to teach the world its own foolishness—this was the Franciscan idea.

The Roman Church, by its benevolent control of the Order's affairs, safeguarding its endowments, acting as administrator to its property, has sedulously overlaid and concealed the original scheme. Even in Francis's lifetime the process had begun : the ministers whom he appointed adopted a changed policy ; and as he saw his beloved Brotherhood falling away from the one sure defence he had devised for it, again and again he cried to his deserting followers : "Do not possess anything !" For this end he wrote his last will and testament : but his loyalty to Rome became his undoing. After his death the Order accepted with a good conscience Rome's dispensation from obedience to its founder's commands. The Kingdom of God which Francis wished to show forth on earth was relegated to the safe cover and

protection of the secular arm. With deep devotion and piety and a great parade of poverty—which while true enough of the individual is no longer true of an Order whose houses and lands are held on a perfectly secure tenure—to-day the Franciscan Brotherhood stands before the world wholly different from that which its founder intended. It no longer demonstrates that which he sought to demonstrate — the security on earth without possession, without protection, without privilege, of those meek men who in the service of Christ espouse poverty.

CHAPTER VI

THE PERSONALITY OF ST FRANCIS

THIS being the scheme and groundwork of his ministry, what of the man? To accomplish the work he did in so short a time, and in the way chosen—by a touch lighter than the laying-on of hands—his personality must have been wonderful. Men worshipped him; and while they worshipped, from his lips came words such as these: "I, Brother Francis, the least of your servants, pray and conjure you by that Love which is God Himself—willing to throw myself at your feet and kiss them—to receive with humility and love these words of our Lord Jesus Christ, to lay them to heart and carry them out in deed." Phrases startling in their extreme humility, and yet of a sincerity beyond doubt. Francis meant not only everything that he said, but much more; words were weak for

the outpouring of his overcharged heart. He had something so wonderfully simple to say that no one could quite believe it—not to the full depth of the perception which for him made life ; so, in his urgency of an ideal which no formula could cover, his words often sound childlike, while in his attitude toward things material there is a touch almost of mockery.

It is difficult not to spoil this Franciscan element by explaining it, since analysis tends to undo in effect that spontaneity which was the root of its virtue. But the very simplicity of form, sometimes even the foolishness in which it stands presented, makes the wisdom of St Francis easy to misread or to underestimate ; and thus we may be led to pass over too lightly his curiously alert manipulation of human character.

For he was the practitioner of a new art and very largely the inventor of it. Human nature was his material, and his method a sort of spiritual ju-jitsu, bringing overthrow to his opponent by the avoidance of resist-

ance or force. Eliminating punishment, repression, wrath, hatred, in all their theological disguises, he sought to reveal to man in processes of self-discovery, through the motions and tendencies of the body, the motions and tendencies of the soul; and the sinner repented not so much by discovering his inclination to do ill as his inclination to do well. In spite of the Manichee influences of his day—influences from which, as shown in his treatment of his own body, he did not wholly escape—St Francis made a great step toward the discovery that human nature, released from cramping conditions, is more prone to virtue than to vice; and to that end —working with instead of against it—he made a larger allowance both for its virtues and its limitations than had ever been done before.

He had his reward. Because of this charitable interpretation, human nature delighted him; he was transcendently amused by it, loved to set traps for it, lay down in the dust that it might fall over him,

and discern in his submissive attitude not the mockery of a harlequin but the worship of a devout lover and servant.

It was a great game, perennial in its freshness, and all the kicks it brought him he met with smiling acceptance. As an athlete stands to receive blows for a test of his strength, and laughs as their weight falls on him, so did Francis lay himself open to humiliation and reproach in order that the sweetness and efficacy of his new gospel might be proved. And let it not be thought that this was done in a morbid craving for mortification and suffering. Francis could not separate himself from his brother man; his whole life had become a sacrament, wherein give and take played equal parts; and when he did these things he knew that he had discovered a way for making wrath and violence seem foolish.

It may be doubted whether he ever really lost his temper, or failed in charity, though sometimes he pretended to do so; and the one unscrupulous point in his character was

that which prompted him to demand of his devout followers on holy obedience that they should inflict penance upon him for his imaginary offences. In time they became wary of him, and would bargain with meek apprehension, seeking to know first what form of indignity they would be called to inflict. Sometimes, in spite of admonition, they disobeyed him; but they never quite cured him; for thus, as practice makes perfect, would Francis rehearse with his brother actors for that larger stage the world, where men were to discover in these mild vagaries of joyous humility the secret of a new wisdom.

It is not derogatory to say that Francis was something of a play actor: his virtues and his limitations alike drew him toward the dramatic form. He preferred intuition to learning, poetry to prose, action to argument, yet the instinct for self-expression was the very marrow of his bones. His conception of the mission that had been laid on him was pictorial and plastic; having realised

the humanity of Christ, he stood up to reproduce Him before the eyes of men. To this end he worked by the most concrete means possible; theory scarcely troubled him; dogma he did not stop to expound; of all that he believed he became the living exponent. He preached by parables, but more eloquently in act than word, and presenting his message of love as a personal equation became himself the actor of a mystery which he bore with him from place to place.

Strip the actor's art of all its tinsel and finery, its self-seeking and love of applause, strip it of all worldly adjuncts, frivolities, and profanities: so conditioned it remains dramatic still. And if we imagine St Francis such an actor, with the world for his stage, and his part a daily intercourse with his fellow-men, we shall realise more easily the absorbed attention which he commanded from the childlike crowds of his day. For think only of the relief it offered from the heavy scholasticism, the formality, the

obscurantism with which Christianity had become overlaid! The formulæ were there; but the form of Christ, as a living embodiment of God's love, was hidden away from men's eyes.

With a gesture of profound humility St Francis revealed it in his own person. Protesting his inadequacy, his unworthiness to be called a disciple, he did Christlike things. He did them in a childlike way, as one who so doing learned a beautiful lesson, primarily for his own delight but with intent also to communicate its joy to others. And thus wherever he went men might expect, and did constantly receive, dramatic expositions of the Christian character as Francis conceived of it. Not by rule, or institution, or long homily, but by a new naturalness of gesture and phrase permeated with the spirit of love, he riveted attention to the personality of Christ, making Him appear not the Founder of a Church nor the Judge of sinners, but the Companion of men. The true social value of the simple and foolish was recognised as

never before; publicans and sinners were restored to their place in the ministry of the gospel.

In this new intimacy between things human and divine Francis did not seek to lessen men's reverence for ecclesiastical authority or to dismiss holy fear from their minds. But though he proposed submission to institutional Christianity he did not propose dependence or reliance on its protective aid; and when he counselled sinners to dread, it was not for fear of pains and punishment inflicted from without, but of the pain and punishment inherent to man's inner being in his rejection of God's love.

It was a tremendous difference; and though Francis employed the accepted phraseology which has lasted from his own day to ours, none the less he called into activity a new motive for the conversion of souls. His sorrow for men's blindness to beauty was a wondering sorrow, and by its naïve expression he conveyed his wonder to others, assuming always that only a little thought

was needed to make other men see as he saw, to sorrow as he sorrowed, and to be joyous with the same joy.

Of his many adventures among the souls of men—for an element of adventure underlies each fresh setting-out—none is more characteristic than his visit to a band of robbers who had become a danger and terror to all about them. We see him—a fearless intruder—sitting down with courteous salutation in their midst. He does not reproach them; he condoles. Nothing but stern necessity, he supposes, could have driven them to such an unhappy life; for to cause pain and grief only saddens the heart, to snatch bread from others is so unappetising, and to be feared and shunned means the leading of a lonely life: the poverty of robbers therefore is far worse and harder to bear than the poverty of poor men. They listen to him, first as a lunatic, and then, on further reflection, as a man of sound sense. By mild reasonableness and charity he wins their hearts.

Take another instance. Many priests led evil lives; and the greatness of the scandal had caused the Cathari amongst others to deny all efficacy to the sacraments when such persons administered them. During a pilgrimage in Lombardy Francis met a priest of this character. Certain Cathari, who chanced to be there, derided the priest, putting him to open shame in the presence of his flock. Francis for answer knelt down and kissed his hands. "I know not," he said, "if these hands be stained as men say of them; but this I know well, they cannot, however stained they may be, hinder the flow and efficacy of divine love. And since through them have come benefits innumerable, I kiss them, honouring God by honouring him whom God has made His minister."

The ease with which Francis solved this problem, so troublesome to others, arose not only from his large heart of charity but from his conception of the all-embracing charity of God. This is shown in the follow-

ing story, where one of his followers tests him, as they sometimes loved to do, in his own coin. The two, Francis and Brother Masseo, are walking side by side; presently in a mocking tone Masseo begins: "Why thee? Why thee? Why thee?" Francis inquires what he means. "What I want to know is," said Masseo, "why on earth everybody goes running after such a man as thee; thou art not handsome, or learned, or of good family. What is it that people see in thee?" These words fall upon Francis like a heavenly benediction; he stands uplifted and entranced. "Would you know why, brother?" he replies. "It is because the Eyes of the Most High have willed it. He watches continually the evil and the good; and as He has not found among sinners any smaller man, more insufficient, or more sinful, therefore He has chosen me to accomplish the work He wills. Me He chose because He could find none more worthless; and so would He confound the dignity and grandeur, the

strength, the beauty and the learning of the world."

And just as he would demonstrate the universality of God's love through His acceptance of sinners, so also would he show that the whole world and every form of life that it contains is part of the divine scheme.

His brief homily to the birds at Bevagna has been preserved for us. Seeing a large flock he goes to meet them, and speaks to them thus: "Brother birds, greatly do you owe love and praise to your Creator; He has given you feathers for clothing, wings for flying, and all things needful. He preserved your seed in the ark that your race might not perish, and made you the noblest of his creatures. You live in the pure air; you have not to sow or reap, and yet He cares for you, watches over you, and guides you. He gives you the streams and fountains for your drink, the hills and valleys for your shelter and the high trees wherein to build your nests. Therefore as your Creator has

shown great love for you beware of the sin of ingratitude, and study always to praise Him."

It is the dramatic instinct once more. By these simple and direct means Francis desires to inspire in his fellow-men a new mind toward nature.

His Canticle of the Sun is directed to the same end; he perceives nothing through his senses that his heart cannot embrace; and that—not because it gives him pleasure but because it relates and binds him more nearly to God. He gives thanks for "Brother Sun made by God to bring light," for "Sister Moon, and the stars which He has set clear and lovely in the heavens," for clouds and calms and all weather by which life in all creatures is upheld, for "Sister Water, serviceable to men, humble, precious and clean," for "Brother Fire, who is bright and pleasant, very mighty and strong," for Mother Earth, "who keeps and sustains us, bringing forth fruits and flowers of many colours, and grass"; and lastly, most char-

acteristic of all, for "Sister Death, from whom in his mortal body no man can escape." Thus even the curse of Adam, accepted in joyous humility, becomes a blessing; for only if we see death, as Francis saw it, in the colours of the rainbow, can mortification be good for the spirit of man.

As a counterblast to the Manichee tendencies of that day such a song had all the value of a creed; after they had received it the brothers on their missions chanted it at the street corners, and in the last hours of his life Francis himself was heard singing it. The spirit of the troubadour never left him; he was always by nature a singer, a player, and a humorist. Noted for his pranks, his merriment, his good-fellowship, his freaks of generous extravagance in the days before his conversion, he carried the resemblance with him through later life, even while transforming it to spiritual ends. In the midst of his worst sufferings we see him smile. "I am not a cuckoo," he says to the doctor who seeks to deceive him when his end is near;

and his deathbed repentance for the over-severe treatment meted out to his frail body: "Brother ass, I have been too hard upon thee!" comes to us gently, almost in the form of a joke.

CHAPTER VII

THE INDULGENCE OF THE PORTIUNCULA

A TRUE understanding of the Franciscan spirit makes less important that accurate knowledge of the events of his life which legend and pious fraud have rendered difficult ; but it serves also to throw unexpected light on certain recorded facts which seem at first sight out of character. Pre-eminently one of these is the action taken by Francis to secure the indulgence of the Portiuncula. So much did this seem to belie his reiterated refusal to seek privileges from the court of Rome that Sabatier was at first disinclined to accept its authenticity. But rightly viewed it becomes one of the most brilliant examples of that peaceful penetration of a corrupt system which was the means by which St Francis effected his revolutions. With those outside the Roman Communion,

indulgences have always been a byword of reproach, and even those within are fain to admit that they have lain peculiarly open to material interpretation and abuse. The remission of the temporal pains of purgatory as a reward for alms-giving or pilgrimage to certain shrines performed in a devout and contrite spirit, will not be confounded by judicious minds with licence to commit sin and evade the consequences; but the injudicious are prone so to confuse them; and Church officials avid for wealth and power have sometimes not unwillingly allowed superstition to prevail. How, then, did Francis come to touch a thing which if not unclean in itself had already become debased and materialised by gross usage?

Let the facts first be stated from the record of a contemporary eye-witness, Jacques de Vitry, discovered only in recent years.

In the year 1216 Pope Innocent died suddenly at Perugia, and Honorius III. was elected his successor. In the first days

of his pontificate, Francis, introduced by Cardinal Ugolino, appeared before him and proffered a request.

"Most Holy Father," he said, "some while ago I repaired for you a church dedicated to the Mother of God; I beg your Holiness to grant to it on the feast of its dedication, an indulgence without alms."

The omission of alms was an innovation contrary to all precedent; this was an application for cure of souls without stipend or endowment—material benefits were to be eliminated. The Pope was puzzled and astonished; but Francis was no longer an unknown man, he stood already with a great following; his request therefore must be considered.

"An indulgence of how many years?" inquired the Pope.

Francis's answer was delightful in its gentle surprise. "Holy Father," he said, "it is not years I am asking for, but souls."

"What do you mean?" said the Pope.

'Most Holy Father," replied Francis,

"what I ask is that all those who come to this church with contrition for sin, having made confession and received absolution, may obtain remission in respect to all sin whether of guilt or penalty, in heaven and on earth, from the day of their baptism to the hour of their coming to this church."

The Pope was beyond measure astonished. The Council of the Lateran only a year before had severely restricted the extension of indulgences—they had become too cheap; in future, dedication-indulgences were not to exceed one year. Francis for his church required one covering a whole lifetime, and that without any gift of alms. Honorius took refuge in precedent. "We don't do such things," he said.

Francis was submissive but firm. "It is not I who make this request," he explained, "but my Lord Jesus Christ, on whose behalf I come."

The thrust proved effective. Honorius granted the Indulgence on the terms stated.

The Cardinals were all up in arms.

Portiuncula, small and without prestige, was obtaining a grant of charity to souls as plenary as, and more free from onerous conditions than that secured by the Crusades, or a pilgrimage to the tombs of the apostles. The ecclesiastical currency would be debased, and other shrines lose their value.

But the Pope held to his word, limiting, however, the duration of the indulgence to the single day of festival. His pronouncement was as follows :

"Henceforth we grant that whosoever shall come and enter this church, truly penitent and having confessed, shall be absolved from all penalty and guilt of sin ; and we ordain that this indulgence hold good every year and for ever, for one day only, from first vespers to vespers of the day following."

His prayer granted, Francis was about to withdraw. "You have not yet obtained your legal proofs," said the Pope. "Is not that rather foolish ? "

Again the sweet and subtle irony of Francis found play. "If this indulgence," said he

"be of God, I leave the showing thereof to Him and have no need of document. Let the Blessed Virgin Mother be the charter, Christ the notary, and the holy angels the witnesses."

And there, so far as evidence goes, the matter ended: no bull or document exists to give the proof which Francis regarded as superfluous. If the record was made in heaven, the Roman *Curia* might publish or conceal legal proof of the transaction just as it liked: it would make no difference. That is what has happened. The Papal grant, left unregistered, has many times been questioned: but in spite of opposition the credentials of the indulgence have held good, and the emblem stands conspicuous among the ordinances of Rome, for its meaning to be read.

Do we not see already, even in this brief account, the working of the mind of St Francis? The system of indulgences was a thing well established by Church rule; it stood on Papal authority. Francis, there-

fore, had no thought of questioning it, but he had an instinctive wish to clear it of abuse, give it a more spiritual interpretation, and relate it more understandably to the immeasurable love of God. And just as he saw himself, poor, mean, and inadequate, the chosen instrument of divine love, so did he desire that this small domestic chapel of his Brotherhood might have a like charge committed to it. Portiuncula was poor and mean and without prestige; it was easy of access, it contained no shrine, it had worked no miracles, and for those very reasons he required that the indulgence given to it should be in the fullest sense plenary—the declaration of an unmeasured release for penitent hearts from the bondage and pains of sin. He wished, that is to say, that it should express precisely and in embracing terms what he himself conceived to be the *modus operandi* of divine love.

His demand was an act of great simplicity and great courage, and was wonderfully done; such a thing had never been asked

before. For this most plenary indulgence no price was to be paid; the broken and the contrite heart was to be the only alms-giving, so one shrine at least should remain pure from the corrupting influence of wealth. It was the assertion, in the bosom of Mother Church, so heavily bejewelled with the gifts of her penitents, of the pure Franciscan doctrine of poverty. But it was something more: if to the Portiuncula, poor, lowly, and without renown, this great spiritual privilege could be attached by a mere word, did it not stand merely as the emblem of a truth deeper and more universal; and was not the indulgence a mere showing, elementary and superfluous, of that which by the operation of divine grace took place in every contrite heart? If this could come about at Portiuncula, why not at every altar in Christendom? The obscure chapel, so highly upraised, seemed thenceforth to reduce the vaunted merits of wealthier and more famous shrines to foolishness.

This Franciscan touch of universality

is the sign-manual of his mission: it lies on everything. We see it in his attitude toward the Church, toward society, toward infidels and sinners, and also toward his own Order. As his love for that grew he could not but enlarge its scope, ridding it of the restrictions which had hitherto obtained in other religious bodies. Thus St Francis is the first founder whose profession extended into three orders, to make more complete the human and communal relation of his Brotherhood to the outside world. In this, as also in the adoption of poverty, his great contemporary St Dominic became his imitator; and that wide extension of the two institutions, developing side by side with such marvellous rapidity, produced a profound change, not only in the social but in the political character of European society during the ensuing centuries. Through these immense organisations, then lying wholly at her disposal, the Church secured a larger hold, both on the lives and temporalities of Western nations; and when in later

times the military era took the place of the ecclesiastical, Europe was scarcely more overrun by standing armies than it had previously been by the religious orders. What, then, might not the Franciscans have accomplished had they faithfully fulfilled the mission of their founder in the day of their prosperity?

The institution of the Second Franciscan Order is closely bound up with the life of St Clare, convert and devoted friend of St Francis, the first of his woman disciples. Daughter of the noble house of Sciffi, born and bred in Assisi, at the age of sixteen she heard the saint preach his first sermon in the cathedral of her native town. His message drew her instantly: two years later, secretly quitting her father's house, she adopted the religious life. Francis himself, though without orders, performed the priestly office and lodged her temporarily in a house of Benedictine nuns till the violent anger of her father should be abated. Before long she was joined by her younger sister, as well as

others; a small commnuity formed itself, and once more the Benedictine monks provided shelter, this time in the disused chapel of St Damien which Francis had repaired for them. Here without separation from the parent stem the Second Order took root and grew just as naturally as the first had done. Under the free, liberalising touch of St Francis it became co-operative; no hard and fast barriers, while the first rule lasted, separated the sisters from the brothers. By labour and alms the latter supplied all their needs, and in return, spinning, weaving, and making, the sisters worked for them.

But for administrative purposes the two Orders had soon to be divided; women could not in those days lead the free and open life of the friars, nomadic and without shelter, and the difference had to be expressed in their rule; conforming to social necessity they became a more home-like expression of the same gospel poverty; and while their brothers provided for them they were still free. Later, by the benevolent tyranny

of Cardinal Ugolino, their protector, a set rule was imposed upon them; but even under the changes which this wrought Clare remained a true Franciscan. Two years after the death of St Francis, Ugolino (then Pope) wished to bestow property upon the Order she ruled, offering, if her vows stood in the way, to dispense her from them. The answer of Clare has in it the accent of Francis. "Absolve me, Holy Father, from my sins," she said, in gentle reproof. "I have no wish to be absolved from following Christ."

That was not the only time when she had to defend the liberties of her Order. On a later occasion the Pope wished to forbid any friar of Portinucula from preaching at St Damien without special permission. Clare's answer was to dispense straightway with the material provision from the same source on which she and her sisters depended for subsistence. "Since we may not," she said, "receive at the hands of our brothers the spiritual bread they bring us, neither will we

receive the material." And faced by this threat of hunger-strike the Pope had to give way.

The relations between Francis and Clare were candid and unembarrassed, not at all monastical. When either friend needed advice they came and consulted together. Visiting the sisters at St Damien Francis would sit at meat with them, and it was while in their company that he composed his Canticle of the Sun.

The convent at St Damien, guarded only by love and poverty, had little of that character of enclosure and confinement which we see in the Poor Clare convents of to-day. These have become dour and a little puritanical in their rejection of beauty. If you present to them a pair of silver candlesticks for their altar they will paint them brown; beauty, they hold, is not for the eye. Yet they will do beautiful things. No beggar who comes to their door is ever turned away, and when their larder is empty and the community starving they ring

a bell and invite the world's charity to their aid.

And in spite of its incredulity the world never fails to respond. Even in Protestant England the Poor Clares' bell will bring food from people who are neither Franciscan nor Catholic; for though in a diminished and impoverished form, the spirit of their founder is with them, and poverty keeps them safe.

The extension of the bond of Franciscan Brotherhood to unprofessed laymen, under the designation of "Tertiaries," was a characteristic innovation following logically upon the spiritual premises of its founder. Embracing those who were occupied in ordinary affairs, domestic and industrial, married as well as unmarried, it established in their lives no set rule except the rule of charity, quickened by the love of poverty. They continued their work in the world; if they had rank they retained it; estates also they held in trust for their descendants; but all that was personally their own they were ready to offer at call for the service of others.

This easy yoke laid on kindred spirits had important social results: it tended, as had also Francis's assumption of the peasant's smock for the garb of his Order, to lessen the barrier between the religious and the lay professions; it also provided a firm footing for the practice in secular life of Christian principles. The vow of charity forbade the assumption by members of any public office involving injustice, corruption or oppression; and it debarred them from enlistment for war. A time came when the Tertiaries resisted the claim of their feudal lords to the military service which was exacted from others, and in this contest between the secular and the spiritual claim, the Papacy gave its support to the Tertiaries. In this it followed the precedent set by Innocent III., who had not only exempted the Humiliants of Milan from the obligations of civil office but had additionally bound them not to take unnecessary oaths; and the feudal oath, involving military service, was adjudged to be one of these. The greater prestige of St

Francis secured, under Popes less courageous than Innocent, a confirmation and extension of the protection extended to the Humiliants; and the claim of the Tertiaries was confirmed and safeguarded by ecclesiastical law. It is a precedent which in these later days certain Roman Catholics, short in their historical memories, would do well to remember. The greatest of all ecclesiastical institutions did once upon a time provide absolute exemption for the conscientious objector. The things belonging to God and the things belonging to Cæsar are still a matter of dispute which institutional Christianity, especially when by law established, does its best to decide in favour of Cæsar.

CHAPTER VIII

FROM BROTHERHOOD TO ORDER

THE records of the Chapters-General of the Franciscan Order give direct proof of extraordinary growth, both in its first and second decade. They also register the continuous attempts, ultimately successful, of institutional Christianity to lay hold for its own ends on the free and vigorous life of the new communism. Constant efforts were made to persuade the Franciscans to adopt the rules of the older Orders; similar pressure was brought on the Dominicans; but while Dominic conformed Francis held out. The peaceful penetration at which he aimed was bound, if it lacked independence, to lose character.

But the more strong and extensive the Order became, the more strenuously did Rome seek to link it up and absorb it in her

own polity. The example set by Francis and his first followers was in itself critical of the growing alliance between spiritual and secular power; it bore witness to a purer ideal, and threatened to make it not merely theoretical but practical. To bind the Brothers Minor to the wheels of her chariot was therefore Rome's aim. She had other reasons also. The bishops, deriving for the most part from noble families, had become feudal lords claiming a sort of heredity, and showing in political matters considerable independence; and the Papacy saw great gain to its central authority if for these could be substituted Franciscan Friars and Dominicans devotedly attached to their spiritual head, backed by popular enthusiasm, and with no local and family interests to serve. The bait of episcopal preferment was offered; Francis steadfastly refused it. "My brothers have not called themselves Minores," he said, "in order to become Majores."

In a similar spirit he rejected the grant of

special privileges to those on mission in foreign countries. His followers represented that permission to preach was often refused them by the bishops; so that for many days they were kept waiting and idle in the towns to which they journeyed. Would it, then, not be worth while, for the speedier conversion of souls, to seek licence from the Pope? "Our work," said Francis, "is first to convert the bishops by our humility and submission; then, when they see us so minded, they will themselves beg us to preach and convert the people. I seek of God no privilege save to be rid of it, to honour all men, and to convert them, as our rule ordains, not so much by speech as by example."

Of his own method of preaching the account of an eye-witness has been preserved, exemplary of that note of quiet reasonableness which he advises in his followers. "In the year 1220," wrote Thomas of Spalato, "while studying at Bologna, I saw St Francis preach before almost every man in the city.

. . . He spoke with so much wisdom and eloquence that many of the learned were filled with admiration. Yet he had not the manner of a preacher, but rather of one holding conversation. The substance of his discourse turned more especially to the abolition of war, and the building up of peaceful alliances. His clothing was poor, his appearance in no way imposing, his face not at all handsome. But God gave such power to his words that he recalled to peace and harmony many nobles who in savage fury had not shrunk from shedding blood. And so great a devotion was felt for him that men and women flocked after him, glad if only they could touch the hem of his raiment."

Francis was then newly returned from his mission to the rival armies in Egypt, and the sense of the futility of "Holy Wars," even when conducted under the Church's blessing, was heavy upon him. He had not, perhaps, found the Soldan any further removed from the pattern of Christ than the Christian forces, many of them his own countrymen,

who, at its fall, raped and ravaged through the streets of Damietta; he was unable to find in the preaching of the Crusades the teaching of Calvary.

Grave troubles which had arisen in the Order during his absence also awaited his solution; decisive changes had taken place and the day of his own rule over it was drawing to an end. This was largely due to the force of circumstances inherent in its success; but even under the simpler conditions of preceding years there had been signs of defection. The constitution of the Order was democratic, and its decisions began soon to reflect a general mind which had failed to assimilate the joyous idealism of its founder. The greed of ecclesiastical power, against which he had sought to guard, was to become its pious undoing.

In Bologna he found the brothers occupying premises which they regarded as their own property, and preparing to set up in rivalry to the Dominicans their own school of theology. He ordered them out; but the

influence of Cardinal Ugolino, the special friend and patron of the Order, was brought to bear : unpersuaded he was yet overruled, the school continued to develop its activities, and to the end of his life Bologna stood to him as the place of departure from which arose all the other subsequent evils.

It was in Bologna—perhaps upon this same visit—that a Dominican came tempting him. The tolerance which Francis showed in his dealings with ordinary sinners had, to the persecuting spirit of the "Preachers," a flavour of heresy. How, inquired the Dominican, was a man to fulfil the scriptural injunction of rebuking the wicked without ceasing? The answer of Francis was complete in its wisdom and simplicity: "By living the life of the gospel." That was the only continual rebuke incumbent on a Christian. Francis had faith in its efficacy, the rest of the mediæval Church had not ; nor has the modern. The witnessing spirit of St Francis, as opposed to the persecuting, still stands almost alone, and even

while he lived his own Order began to forsake it.

As chapter succeeded chapter they gradually lost their earlier character. The most famous of all, that of 1219, popularly known as "The Chapter of Mats," marks the transition; it was the last over which Francis, then starting on his mission to the East, personally presided.

This gathering was of a truly extraordinary character. It took place in early summer; and about the walls of Portiuncula five thousand brothers assembled from all parts of the country. Assisi could not accommodate so vast an assembly; but a large building, specially erected by the citizens, was placed at their disposal. At the instance of Francis, however, a less imposing form of habitation was devised, and along the valley below the walls of the city the brethren wove to themselves the booths of reeds and rushes resting on branches which gave the chapter its name. They made no other provision; all their

wants were freely supplied by the inhabitants of the surrounding country. It is recorded that St Dominic, present on that occasion, was so greatly impressed by this joyous and unembarrassed solution of the problem, and by the response which it evoked from the common people, that he resolved thereupon to adopt for his own Order a like rule of holy poverty.

But this chapter was in reality a farewell to the old familiarity, so parental in character, which without a written constitution had bound Francis to his sons. The appointment of Ministers-General, to whom Francis himself henceforth owed obedience, and the elaboration of the written rule on an initiative often contrary in spirit, were the beginning of a dull, regularising tendency of which Francis before long became acutely aware.

Yet doubtless the Order had become too large for his own individual control; he had not the mind or the temperament for official administration; and so soon as he perceived

the fact he committed the keeping of the Order to other hands. "Take, Lord!" he cried in his valedictory address. "I return to Thee this family which Thou gavest me. Now, as Thou knowest, most sweet Jesu, I have no longer the strength nor the ability to hold charge of them: therefore I confide them to the ministers."

This took place at the chapter which Francis attended in the spring of 1221 on his return from Egypt. It marked the end of his struggle from the seat of authority to resist the materialising influences. From that date forward, encroachments on the primitive rule which had before been tentative became hardened and stereotyped. The old freedom to eat meat made way for an extended and meticulous rule of abstinence; manual labour diminished; here and there communities assumed proprietary rights in the buildings which they occupied; in theory and learning they began with professional rivalry to compete with the Dominicans, and for the glory of God to

accept from those high in authority privileges denied to the seculars.

It was the peaceful penetration of Ugolino, then shortly to become Pope, working its way in the Franciscan Order much as Francis had hoped to work for other ends through the whole body of Christendom; and when mere persuasion failed, Ugolino, supported by the politically minded Brother Elias, second Minister-General, as well as by others, imposed his spiritual authority.

Too late, having resigned office, Francis saw what was happening, and though he observed discipline he did not always keep silent. The Order still had the right of self-government, at least to elect its own rulers; but under these obedience was taking a new form, an aspect, not of life, but of death. In the original Franciscan rule the vow of obedience had simply meant service to all, the willing granting of claims made by others; now it had come to mean blind submission to authority.

One terrible utterance of St Francis stands

witness to his grief over the change. Sitting among his companions one day he began to groan heavily. "Alas!" he cried, "where shall we find a monk perfect in obedience to his superior?" Much astonished, the brethren asked wherein perfection consisted, and in what respect they fell short of it. "It is like this," replied Francis. "Take a dead body and put it where you will, it offers no resistance; place it there, it will not murmur; take it away, it will not object. Put it in a pulpit, it will not look up but down; clothe it in purple and it will only appear more corpse-like."

So he saw blind obedience to direction from without, threatening the freedom of his Order; the purple of episcopal preferment was about to descend on it. How unconsciously prophetic, on resigning office, had been his cry to the brothers: "Henceforth I am dead to you!" For the old joyous spirit a new letter was being substituted.

The change deeply affected him. One

day a brother, coming from afar to consult him, asked whether—should the Order hereafter cease to live according to the rule—it would then be permissible to separate from it and maintain the strict observance. Deeply moved, Francis answered: "Not only I, but our Lord Himself authorises you to do so." Impulsively he stretched out his hands and laid them on the brother's head in blessing. "Thou," he cried, "art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec."

Clearly it was not the obedience of a dead body that Francis sought to inculcate when he said this. He knew that he had founded his Order on nothing but the express command of Christ; and against that there could be no countervailing authority. Men might stray from it of their own will, they might elect false guides to cover their defection, yet its truth remained.

But though here he seems almost to counsel resistance by others, he himself submits; under the injunction of his superiors he

breaks the frank relations which have hitherto subsisted between himself and the Sisters of St Clare ; and when at the urgency of that courageous spirit, protestant against the new rule, he goes to preach to them, it is only to announce that henceforth they are to regard him as dead. Symbolising the harsh order laid on him he takes ashes, sprinkles them upon head and feet, and reciting the *miserere* passes out of their midst.

The incident seems to set the note for the life of renunciation which followed. Francis having laid by authority, jurisdiction was now in the hands of others, and he could not adopt toward the superiors of his Order any more than toward the Church the attitude of revolt. He could plead, he could restate his conviction in unequivocal terms, he could bear witness in his own body to the pattern which others forsook, but he could not introduce contention and strife. So the reshaping of the Order went on.

A passage in Sabatier's *Life* records concisely what was then taking place :

"After the chapter of 1221, the evolution of the Order hurried on with a rapidity which nothing was strong enough to check. The creation of ministers was an enormous step in this direction; by the very pressure of things the latter came to establish a residence; those who command must have their subordinates within reach, must know at all times where they are; the brothers, therefore, could no longer continue to do without convents properly so called. This change naturally brought about many others; up to this time they had had no churches. Without churches the friars were only itinerant preachers, and their purpose could not but be perfectly disinterested; they were, as Francis wished, the friendly auxiliaries of the clergy. With churches it was inevitable that they should first fatally aspire to preach in them and attract the crowd to them, then in some sort erect them into counter parishes."

That is what happened, and out of it came

jealousy. Gradually the breach between the Franciscans and the Seculars widened. It began even in Francis's own lifetime; the favour of Rome went to the Religious Orders; they were the better instruments for the centralisation of power.

From that time on we see a great change taking place in the life of St Francis; he becomes more of an ecstatic and more of a recluse. Now and again the ministers of the Order still employ him to act officially, though rejecting or suppressing the results if they prove inconvenient; on great occasions he remains its figure-head; stimulates the new "obedience" by appearing in Convocation seated at the feet of the Vicar-General; in 1223 goes to Rome to receive the Pope's ratification of the finally amended rule (a compilation which was twice suppressed by Brother Elias in his endeavour to secure from Francis a closer conformity with his views); and is still—even in an increasing degree, as he travels from place to place—the centre of popular enthusiasm and worship.

But for the most part the Order sets him free, with his own small band of followers, to go his own way, living in retreat among mountain solitudes or conducting missions in the districts of middle Italy.

It would almost seem as though Francis, at this time, feeling that his organised work had been a failure, set himself the more strenuously to realise in his own person the pattern of his worship and adoration; that so, if in no other way, he might make Christ visible to the consciences of men. The tremendous spiritual energy which inhabited his frail body assumed a more intense form, and in his straining toward a personal union with the Love Invisible he committed himself to ascetic practices which passed all bounds. When founding his Order he had enjoined on his disciples to treat their bodies reasonably; he was no longer reasonable to his own; and we see him pass from the happy communal and practical life of the early days at Portiuncula into a phase of trials, visions and

temptations which while they often reveal an exalted beauty are not without their demoniacal elements. Yet this phase, when Francis is least himself, has been seized on above all others, for pious celebration; on this his rank in the hierarchy of Heaven is based. Around these strainings of fevered devotion legends gather; indecent spyings take place, or have to be invented, so that the world may become spectator to trances, levitations, encirclements of fire, voices issuing from cloud, transportations miraculously effected. Is it too much to say that these things are of small concern to those who have realised the greater wonder of divine charity made manifest in the life of St Francis, and in his twenty years of ministry to the griefs of men? Those who give its due place to Love's sacramental mystery do not run after miracle.

But while Francis had become well nigh impossible to the Order in its more regularised form, his personality was still of use. For the final success and glorification of the

Order it was necessary that he should become a great saint and worker of miracles. Had he stayed in closer touch with the administrating officials, he would have been something of an embarrassment ; released to take up his dwelling in mountain solitudes and caves, he built up the legend that they required of him. And when he came back to Portiuncula to die, his body had become so precious that even while it lived they feared lest it should be stolen from them ; and after death, in the vast basilica built to contain it, hid it in desperate haste with midnight burial, no man knew where.

CHAPTER IX

THE STIGMATA

At the beginning of his ministry Francis had set out to convert the world by example. When others joined him at Rivo Torto and Portiuncula in that life of joyous poverty and communal service to which he invited them, he saw the desire of his soul and was satisfied. This single ear of wheat was the seed he wished to sow, hoping by its means to permeate Christendom.

The hope failed : under the control of the ministers the character of the Order changed. But though its direction passed out of his hands and went contrary to his ideal, Francis did not abandon his faith in that means of conversion on which he had based his ministry. He still clung to the exemplary method and remained an imagist. If he had failed it was only because he had fallen short

of that pattern which had but to be shown steadfastly before men's eyes for the triumph of Calvary to become universal. "I, if I be lifted up," Christ had declared, "will draw all men unto me." Francis believed this absolutely; and the trouble of mind which fell upon him, in his later years, arose mainly from a fear that he had not been faithful to his ideal, the setting forth of the pattern of Christ.

In this perturbation of spirit he suffered from demoniacal visitations which had not before troubled him. He met them by increased austerities, often of an extravagant character, seeking by these means to become a more perfect exemplar of the Life with which in moments of ecstasy he seemed to be one. In this last transcendent effort he sought to place before his beloved Order, on a more exalted scale, that pattern by which formerly, with so much humour and courtesy and charity, he had touched the hearts of common men. It was an act of self-immolation, and though transfused by love,

and full sometimes of tenderness, sometimes of dramatic beauty, it remains a tragedy.

For three years the struggle goes on. As the ecstasy rises to its touching climax it is still as an imagist that we see him and hear him speak. In the depth of winter human temptations assail him; there comes a momentary longing for the domestic life from which the religious call has separated him. Naked he flings himself into the snow, gathers it to his breast, heaps and shapes it into form. "These," he cries, "are my wife, my sons and daughters!" and by the cold, freezing reality he dispels the human vision which has attracted him.

To this period also belongs a strange and beautiful prayer in celebration of poverty, which without preface or invocation begins thus: "Poverty was in the crib, and like a faithful squire kept herself armed in the great conflict Thou didst wage for our redemption. During Thy passion she alone did not forsake Thee. Mary Thy Mother stayed at the foot of the Cross, but Poverty

mounted to Thy side and held Thee embraced unto the end. When Thou wast dying of thirst she as a watchful spouse prepared gall for Thee ; in the ardour of her embrace Thou didst expire, nor in Thy death, Lord Jesus, would she forsake Thee, suffering Thy body to rest only in a borrowed grave. O poorest Jesus, this grace I implore, bestow on me the treasure of the highest poverty ! Grant to our Order that by this mark it may be known ; never under the sun, nor for the glory of Thy name, to possess anything, and to have no other patrimony than the begging of alms."

It is the prayer of an imagist, giving to his ideal the most concrete form he can devise. And it is the imagist again who at Greccio, on Christmas Eve in the year 1223, reconstructs the Manger of Bethlehem in the wood above the hermitage, and preaching before it to a devout crowd of midnight worshippers so brings home the scene to the hearts of his hearers that some believe they see in the place prepared a miraculous appearance

of Mother and Child, and that at the Saint's adoring touch the Babe, lying motionless and without breath, awakes to life.

Thus did the "Crib," now so familiar to Catholic congregations, have its origin in the midnight Mass at Greccio; while from this same source may also have sprung the "Nativity plays" which in the succeeding centuries formed so popular a feature of mediæval Christianity.

In such devices the genius of St Francis found natural expression; he had the dramatic form in his blood, and ever sought to convey living truth not by argument but by actual demonstration. To show men the birth of Christ seemed better than talking about it; to express Christ's pattern in human terms, and above all to bring home to them the true image of His Passion as the most perfect expression of divine love was the end for which he lived. Anything which would aid this ideal he strained for with increasing fervour, anything which might hinder he

strove to mortify and annihilate. Hence those terrible austerities which in the last phase of his career he undoubtedly practised ; hence the repeated prayer, which found its fulfilment on Mount Alvernia, that he might experience in his own body the grief and suffering of Christ upon the Cross. Thus only could his imagist mind have sure proof of the complete union he yearned for ; if he, the lowest and least worthy, could achieve that, the way of the Cross would become patent to all : ignorance, and failure to realise alone stood between man and that rest in God which the love of Calvary had prepared for him.

An ideal so lofty, so full of burning charity, deserves not that the derogatory term " obsession " should be applied to it ; but the intensity of the feeling must be recognised, since it helps to explain the event. More and more as time went on this thought became inseparable from life, his vital energies were consumed by it, and every beat of his pulse was a throb of longing for a

consummation, personal in character though universal in application.

The story of the Stigmata comes to us by one channel only—the awestruck whisper of Francis to a few of his closest and most faithful followers, and by them repeated at a later time to others. No one witnessed the event. The Saint himself was reluctant to tell of it till circumstances made concealment impossible; and the account comes thus, in the first place, not from ambitious ecclesiastical schemers like Brother Elias, the Minister-General, capable perhaps of straining the truth in order to build up a legend of wonder and miracle, but from simple and devout men who, in subsequent years, were themselves fugitives from the Order, persecuted for too faithful an adherence to their master's precepts.

In these days it is possible, even for sceptics, to accept quite literally and apart from legend the ultimate fact of the Stigmata, regarding as a morbid pathological phenomenon what, in the time of St Francis,

could only have been looked on as a transcendent miracle.

The 'miracle' took place in the early autumn of 1224, on Mount Alvernia, in a high hermitage overlooking a ravine, whither Francis, accompanied by four of his followers, had retired to observe with special devotion the Lent of the festival of St Michael. With mind and spirit wholly absorbed in the contemplation of two aspects of Divine Love—the Passion of Christ, and the operation of Angels—the Saint was visited, on the feast-day of Holy Cross about the hour of dawn, by a vision of beauty which seemed the consummation and satisfaction of his whole spiritual need. A youth of angelic form borne upon six wings, wearing in his body the marks of Christ's Passion and upon his face an expression of mingled love and suffering, appeared before him in the light of the newly risen sun. Smitten by the seraphic vision in body and spirit, the Saint passed into a state of ecstatic union, in which grief and joy were equally blended,

and when, after that supreme moment of realisation, the vision passed away, he found in his own body the scars and nailprints of one crucified.

There is a point in this relation worth noting. These were not merely wounds: they had in addition an appearance of nails —a blackness of nails, *clavorum nigredinem*, is the phrase used by the early chronicler— the heads showing upon one side, the points lying deflected along the flesh upon the other. Just as the Saint had envisaged his crucified Lord, bearing in hands and feet not wounds only, but the nails also which had caused them, so in his own body a like thing comes to pass. In this mysterious functioning of a triumphant imagism, body reflects mind; the servant, submissive to higher ruling, obeys its lord.

In devout humility the Saint sought for a time to conceal the mystery even from his dearest intimates; but not only did this become increasingly difficult, he had also a scruple whether it was right to do so.

Eventually he confided the facts to Brother Leo (whom alone he permitted to handle and dress the wounds) and two others, Ruffino and Illuminato, informing them yet further, what had since been revealed to him, that the angelic apparition had, under the form of a seraph, been Christ Himself.

Thus, in a maimed and suffering body, the spirit of Francis found its rest. From this time forward he was penetrated according to his desire by a full sense of the suffering and sorrow of his Lord; he and his divine pattern had become one.

At this moment of spiritual exaltation, when all his own aspirations were satisfied, we find Francis giving comfort with characteristic tenderness to one of his weaker followers. Brother Leo, the best beloved of his disciples, witnessing the beatitude of his master on heights he could not attain, had fallen into spiritual despair—a despair so great that even to Francis he dared not reveal it. Doubt of his soul's health and salvation had come to him; he believed

himself an outcast from divine grace. But though no word of it reached his ear, St Francis knew intuitively the trouble of his follower. Just at this time he had composed a hymn in praise of the Redeemer, and one day he put into Leo's hand, as he stood waiting beside him, a parchment containing a copy of it; but, on the back of the parchment was something of more personal application—first the blessing pronounced by Moses on the children of Israel, and under this the words: "Brother Leo, may our Lord bless thee!" Beneath this again he had drawn the rude outline of a head, and upon it, so as to link it with Leo's name written above, the sign of the Cross. As Leo looked at it, despair, we are told, vanished from his soul, never again to return.

From Mount Alvernia, too weak to go upon foot, Francis, tenderly borne by his disciples, returned by slow stages to Assisi. He was stricken for death; from that time during the two years that followed life held him with difficulty. Often the anguish of

the wounds was very great, and both from these and from the internal seat of the malady which was the final cause of his death frequent bleedings drained his body of strength.

But joy of spirit had returned to him ; and though he could not walk he set out with renewed energy in the following year for an evangelising mission through Umbria.

He did not get far : bodily strength failed him. A new infirmity supervened—inflammation of the eyes so acute that he could hardly endure the light. The crude medical remedies of the time brought no benefit ; blindness threatened. Cardinal Ugolino, hearing of his plight, summoned him to Rieti, there to be treated by a physician of repute attached to the Papal court. It was then middle spring.

On his way thither, Francis paid a last visit to the sisterhood of St Damien, at the eager solicitation of Clare, anxious to bestow on him the consolations of her deep and understanding friendship, and sensible comfort in

his physical distress. The visit, which was to have been for one day only, was prolonged by sickness over a period of six weeks. In the convent garden Clare caused a hut of wattles to be built for her beloved guest, and there with the rest of the sisters ministered to his need, which was often very great. Upon the deep physical prostration he then endured there appears to have followed a temporary depression of spirit; but in that abode of peace visionary consolations were not lacking; his soul revived, and under their inspiration he wrote in the latter part of his sojourn, that famous Canticle of the Sun which sums up in so Franciscan a form his creed of mystic universality.

The brothers, going forth to their missions, committed it to heart and went about chanting it, conveying in the sweetness of its imagery a new and speaking likeness of St Francis to the minds of men. Scarcely had it been written when opportunity came for its virtues to be tested. Feud of long standing between the municipality of Assisi and

the bishop had suddenly become violent. Francis hearing of it intervened in the cause of peace. By means of messengers he called a conference of the disputants at the bishop's palace; and when all were there assembled caused the Canticle of the Sun, with a final verse composed for the occasion, to be chanted by the brethren.

"Praise be to Thee, O Lord," ran the new invocation, "for those who for love of Thee grant pardon, bear weakness, endure stripes. Blessed are they who continue to dwell in peace, for by Thee, the Highest, shall they be crowned."

The gospel simplicity of the message went home to the hearts of its hearers; once more the dreamer proved the practical politician; the antagonists became reconciled, and Francis, in resuming his interrupted journey to Rieti, had the satisfaction of knowing that he had again given peace to his native city.

Legends of miracle mark the route taken by the dying Saint, both upon his going and his return. The rumour of the Stigmata

having gone abroad, crowds from far and near flocked to gaze at him and touch the hem of his robe. But though we read of life and healing bestowed on others, his journey, so painfully achieved, brought little benefit to himself.

Arrived at Rieti, he underwent with patient resignation the drastic treatment which the physician prescribed for him. This involved the cauterising with hot irons of cheek, forehead and ears. During the preparations the Father's courage momentarily failed; but charity brought strength. Making the sign of the Cross over the instrument as it approached to perform its work, "O brother fire," he cried, "most beautiful of all creatures, be courteous to me at this hour, knowing how well I have always loved thee and ever will for His love Who created thee!"

In that ardour of mood he underwent the fiery trial almost without feeling it. "Oh, weak and of little faith," he said, smiling upon their return to those of his attendants who had fled from sight of the operation,

"why did you run away? I felt no pain at all. If the doctor so wishes, he may burn me again."

All his recorded words and acts of this time are full of the old human sweetness: hope for the Order seems to have come back to him. "My brothers," he is heard constantly repeating, "let us now begin to serve God, for hitherto we have done nothing!" At one stage of his travels, sleepless with physical anguish, he asks for music. The request seems to savour of things sensual; its satisfaction may cause scandal, and it is denied him. But that night, as Francis lies awake, his ear is soothed by strains of celestial harmony such as he has never heard before. He tells the brothers of it. "Children of the world," he says, "do not understand divine sacraments: the consolation that earth would not give heaven has granted me."

The remainder of this year was spent either at Rieti or in a hermitage on Mount Rainerio. Christmas finds him at a neigh-

bouring village, whither crowds from the surrounding country flock to hear him. "You come here," he says with quiet humour, "expecting to find a great saint: but what will you think of me when I tell you that I ate meat all through Advent?" The pattern of ecclesiastical sanctity to which some would have him conform is still little to his liking.

From Rainerio in the course of the winter he went to Siena, for treatment by a famous oculist. No good came of it; physical darkness continued to descend on him; dropsy also took hold of his lower limbs and began to invade the body. The slow stages of his homeward return were brought gradually to a standstill.

But the more life exhausts itself the more he longs to return to Portiuncula; love of locality is the one instinct of possession he still allows himself. Brother Elias, hearing of his perilous condition, comes to guard and superintend the removal of the precious relic. Dangerous districts have to be passed;

Perugia is avoided lest the citizens should steal him and keep him by force till he is dead: for miracle-working shrines mean wealth, and the stigmatised body is worth a fortune.

Assisi, anxious to have him safe, sends men-at-arms to accompany him; and the little man of peace goes martially attended, a price upon his head. Helpless to defend himself from its fierce favours, he sees the world take possession of him. On the road his escort stops at a village to buy food, and the villagers will not sell. Francis, hearing of the difficulty, advises his followers to ask as a free gift and for kindness what they cannot obtain for money; and his true reading of the peasant character brings its reward.

So, after many vicissitudes and much suffering, the dying saint is brought back to his native city in triumph. All the citizens rush out to meet him; they welcome him with acclamations of joy. Jealous of possession, they have their own again. They have but to look on his face to see he is almost dead. Assisi's birthright is safe.

CHAPTER X

SISTER DEATH

FRANCIS was lodged in the Bishop's palace ; for did he not belong to the Church ? A strong civic guard was set about the walls to prevent the Church from spiriting him away ; for did he not belong to Assisi ? Thus, by combined custody, the rival claims were satisfied. Francis with his whole soul desired to be at Portiuncula, but was not allowed to go, and his imprisonment lasted from July till late in September.

It was a matter of three wills. But meekness, the most possessive of the beatitudes, has a curious way of coming by its own ; and in the end Francis won.

His physical case had become desperate ; cancer of the liver, it is surmised, was the disease which was killing him, and his anguish of body was often extreme. Now

and again came respite; when it did his spirit soared. He began singing; if his own voice failed for pain or weakness, Brothers Leo and Angelo were there to take up the tale. Thus from morning till night song resounded.

His singing became a scandal; all the city heard of it; this was not the way in which a saint should die. Brother Elias came and besought him, for the sake of his future reputation, to hold his tongue. Francis was not to be persuaded; he did not care a fig for his reputation, he wanted to be let out of his cage and return to Portiuncula. So, like a lark, he continued to sing the praises of Sister Death.

Masterful Brother Elias bestirred himself. At Portiuncula it would not matter how Francis conducted himself; there with only the Brotherhood to hear him his reputation would be safe. He obtained the consent of the Bishop and of the City Fathers to let him be taken away.

The dying man, whom everybody wor-

shipped, but whose wishes they were so reluctant to satisfy, was placed upon a litter and carried down to Portiuncula. At the house of the lepers standing half-way he caused his blind face to be turned toward the city he could no longer see, and with raised hands blessed and bade it farewell.

At Portiuncula Francis was once more in the bosom of his family. But the familiar domestic surroundings did not narrow his outlook, rather they served to widen it. Since here the Order had had its birth, his mind went out to all the brethren, not only those living then but in time to come. He began sending out messages and blessings to all. A novice entering the Franciscan Order to-day may still, reading those words, feel the breath of the Father's blessing upon his brow, and be assured, however far obedience to his superiors now carries him from the strict observance, that the loving spirit of the founder remains imperishable.

For a few days after his arrival pain ceased. Taking advantage of this respite, and know-

ing that he had not many days to live, Francis made his will. It was a last effort, the rewriting of the rule having failed of effect, to restore the discipline of the Order to purity. It is too long to give here; but its main drift, the reassertion of the principle not only of individual but of communal poverty and freedom from all material ties, cannot be questioned. The mere fact that it was so summarily rejected and set aside is but added proof.

The most crucial passages are these which follow :—

"When the Lord gave me a few brothers, no one told me what I ought to do, for the Most High revealed it to me that I should live in accordance with the gospel. I caused a short formula to be written, and our lord the Pope confirmed it for me. . . . Those who came to live this life gave all that they had to the poor. They were contented to wear a patched tunic, a cord and breeches; we desired nothing more. The clerks said

their office and the laymen the Pater-noster. We lived in poor and abandoned churches; we were ignorant and obedient to all. I worked with my hands and would do so still, and I wish that all other Brothers work at some honourable trade. Let those who have none learn, not for the purpose of gain, but as an example to others and to flee idleness. And when men will not give us the price of our work let us turn to the bounty of God, begging our bread from door to door. And Our Lord has revealed to me the salutation which we should offer—'God give you peace!'

"Let the Brothers take great care not to receive churches, dwellings, or anything that men build for them, except as conforms with holy poverty and let them not receive hospitality except as strangers and pilgrims.

"I absolutely forbid the Brothers, in whatever place they may be, to ask any bull from the court of Rome, whether directly or no, either for church, or convent, or preaching, or even for personal protection. And if they are not received anywhere let them go else-

where, so doing penance with the blessing of God. . . . And let not the Brothers say 'This is a new Rule'; for this is a reminder, a warning, an exhortation, and is my Will that I, little Brother Francis, make for you. . . . Let the Ministers-General and all others be held by obedience to add nothing and take nothing from these words . . . and when the Rule is read let these words be read also.

"I forbid absolutely, by obedience, all Brothers, clerics and laymen, to insert glosses in the Rule or in this Will under pretext of explaining it. For since the Lord has given it me to speak and to write the Rule and these words simply and clearly without commentary let them be so understood and so practised to the end."

What Francis did for the Order with his dying hands, Rome undid for it in the year following his death. Too well known to be suppressed, adopted as their charter of right by the 'Zealots'—Brother Leo and

others—and only finally disposed of by a papal bull six years later, the Will was from the very first set aside and the work of the Ministers-General established in its place.

Francis had done all he could; of his intention, at least, henceforth there could be no doubt.

The events that follow, beautiful and personal in character, hardly concern the Order at all. Having done his best for the brethren, Francis composed himself without reserve to await the coming of the end. "Welcome, Sister Death!" he cried when the physician told him plainly that he must expect to die early in the month of October, and a little later: "Call to me Brother Leo, and Brother Angelo that they may sing to me of Sister Death."

Three days before the end he caused himself to be stripped of his clothing and laid upon the bare earth, giving directions that the same thing should be done at the actual moment of his death. "And when I am

dead," he added, " so leave me for such time as it takes a man to walk a mile."

Another day came, and the chanting of psalms and canticles went on, his own weak voice joining with those of others. On the evening of that day he gave all the brothers present his blessing, praying a like grace for the absent ones.

Almost his last act before unconsciousness fell on him was to call for bread, and in sacramental fashion as a pledge of love and remembrance, break and distribute it to his disciples. And this he continued doing till his hands, too weak themselves, had to be assisted by others.

Death came at sunset on the evening of Saturday, 3rd October, 1226. Serenely quiet at the last, he passed from life without a word; and to the interior silence as the brothers knelt watching came from the twilight without a loud and multitudinous singing of larks.

The next day the body of the Saint was borne in a strong and well-guarded coffin to

the citizens' Church of San Giorgio, there to await the more splendid receptacle which had already been planned for it.

Two years later, Ugolino, then Pope Gregory IX., came in state to Assisi to perform a double ceremony, the canonisation of the Saint and the first-stone laying of the great church which commemorates his name. Thither on 25th May 1230, the body was secretly removed ; and even over that second burial, conducted in haste and at the dead of night, there was a sudden clash of arms through fear lest Assisi might yet be robbed of her most priceless possession—the withered flesh and dry bones of the man whose whole will was to possess nothing. It was life's final irony, brought about, as all the previous ironies had been, under the ægis and authority of institutional Christianity.

With lavish expenditure and magnificent ostentation the Church forgave St Francis his love of poverty. That defection from her scheme of temporal power she covered with a cloak of subtle embroideries. Over

the bones of the little poor man of Assisi she spread a purple pall, and underneath its broad folds the bones also of his Order rest in peace.

So her version of him stands magnificently to catch the eye; but the other version—his own—still endures.

"Write how I love all my brethren who are now in our religion and who shall ever come into it even to the end of the world. And since, on account of my weakness and the pain of my infirmity, I am not able to speak much, in these three words I briefly lay open my will and intention to all the brethren present and to come: namely that, in token of my memory and blessing and last will, they love one another as I have loved them; that they for ever love and observe our Lady Poverty; and that they be always loyal and subject to the prelates and clergy of Holy Mother Church."

CHAPTER XI

THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT

THE influence of St Francis is the most illimitable and incalculable spiritual event which has befallen the world since the beginning of the Christian era. Perhaps this is only another way of saying that his life is the most Christian thing which Christianity has yet produced.

Why of all the saints does he stand so much alone? What is it that differentiates him from the rest? We hear his name used to indicate a certain attitude toward life that men have discerned more plainly in him than in others. But what exactly is that attitude? Can it be defined, or is it only to be felt, spiritually sensed, but not to be reasoned about?

In the main it was a rediscovery of human nature—a rediscovery based on a belief and

trust in its underlying goodness. Throughout the Dark Ages, after the Church had fought down paganism, man had been taught that his tendency was to do evil. Francis set himself, on the contrary, to show man that his tendency was to do good; and for the simple and sufficient reason that, in the direction of good, human joy awaited him Good and joy were, for St Francis, interchangeable terms; and as, in the process of creation, God viewing His work each day had seen that it was good, it followed necessarily that the whole creation was an act of joy, and must so be viewed by man before he could become sacramentally at one with the mind of His Creator. Since, then, God enjoyed the world, man must enjoy it also; and the way was easy; he had only to be himself, to be good. But the pattern of all goodness was Christ; and the astounding paradox before which Francis stood eternally amazed was that when Joy came visibly to earth, man, blind to its true meaning, had slain it. Afterwards he had come to know

what he had done; but in the mystery of that wounding there had come to the world a new sacrament; and man must receive back into his heart the Passion of His Lord, in order to realise and make once more his own the joy which behind the veil of sin lay everywhere.

Thus in maimed form and through much suffering Francis, while he strove to embody Christ, strove also to embody joy. Behind all contrary appearances Christ and joy were truly and indivisibly one. That is the explanation of him and of his creed. "This," he seems to say to his fellow-man, "is the instantaneous cure of all ill, all grief, all sin. Do you suffer pain, or injury, or wrong? You bear it more easily by smiling on it than by weeping. Are you humbled to the dust? Remember that brother dust is God's making, and you sit the equal of kings. Do men meditate violence or mischief against you? Then be much more than forgiving; consent so swiftly and heartily to the trespass they intend that you undo the mischief ere it is

begun. Like a lover or a host ready with welcome, you run to meet them, making them virtuous before they are aware! They come to wrong you? You thank them for doing you a favour. They seek to defraud you? They enable you to bestow on them a gift. They mock and rail against you? It is a kind showing of faults you might otherwise have forgot. They take from you your dearest possession? They give you the freedom that poverty alone can bring.

Is all this a foolishness of mockery and of make-believe? By no means: for if you so deal with it human nature responds, meets you half-way, becomes—perhaps to its own surprise—the great miracle.

Thus with the touch of a child St Francis shows how on earth man may enter into heaven. You cannot reason with him for he is above reason; you cannot prevent him, for he is there before you; you cannot be angry with him, for your anger has nothing on which to strike. Reducing every evil

motion to impotence he throws you back on yourself, and makes you realise with a shock that you are good—that good has only to be presented to you unconditionally and you recognise it as your birthright—a thing of which, so long defrauded, you now become repossessed. Human nature is the great miracle, for it is the image of God.

Thus the work of the followers of St Francis is to make heaven wherever they go : and if you have the true Franciscan spirit you do it like a child playing a game. It is this which makes so Franciscan in character the old tale of *Our Lady's Juggler*—the poor little despised friar too simple and unlearned to join in the sacred office with others, whose single accomplishment is that he can tumble and dance ; and so he dances to the scandal of the world till the light of heaven shines on him. It is this which gives virtue to the foolish blunderings of Brother Juniper ; we see him on a see-saw with children to escape the adulations of a crowd, or carrying hot posset at midnight to the cell of the Father

Prior whose voice has grown hoarse with scolding him ; or cutting bells from an altar-cloth to satisfy the need of a poor woman, or cooking in one jorum the monastery's meals for a whole fortnight : his very mistakes the proof of an ebullience of love. It is this which makes the sweet foolishness of many a tale in the Fioretti sound better than wisdom; because, when love is everywhere, wisdom and prudence (being less necessary) take a place of comparative unimportance. Many of the tales in the Fioretti may not be true, yet they convey a true atmosphere and show better than official records the spirit which Francis bequeathed to his true followers.

The main account of the Saint's life comes to us from Thomas of Celano. His was the story compiled at the order of Bonaventura to wipe out and replace all the unauthorised versions preceding it ; and Professor Nino Tamassia has shown in an exhaustive analysis that a very large proportion of his material is merely an adaptation from the legends of earlier saints. Celano's aim was to build up

an ecclesiastical portrait in close conformity with the requirements of the reconstructed Order, fulfilling the monastic tradition which the incalculable ways of St Francis had done so much to disturb. It is the more remarkable that out of a portrait so elaborated emerge traits of a singularly unmonastic character—divergences in which the consistency of the formal legend breaks down. And here, assuredly, we are on safe ground: these side-dishes of the feast which Thomas so piously sets before us are the real thing. Some of them have been given in the preceding pages, but there remain others. When Francis in his isolation on Mount Alvernia finds solace in the companionship of a falcon; when on his last journey he gives his new cloak to a beggar and slyly tells him not to let Brother Elias have it back again except at a good price; when he sits at meat with the Sisters of St Clare, and receives even on his deathbed the visit of a woman friend; when in the joyousness of his heart he takes two sticks and plays on them, or

loses himself in the beauty of sunshine and flowers ; when he reiterates his rule of absolute poverty, refusing to accept even as a gift a building appropriated to the theological training of the Order ; when he admits having eaten meat in Advent, and to the scandal of the pious goes singing to his death—then, without doubt, in these touches so curiously out of key with others more highly fancied and elaborated, we have before us the true St Francis : Celano lets more escape than he knows, and the meek man comes back into his inheritance.

But those whose hearts are keyed to the message which St Francis came to deliver will not need words to guide them to the sorting of false from true. An imagist in his methods, it is as an image of spiritual beauty that Francis still stands clearly revealed to his faithful followers.

In the Fioretti is told a very beautiful story of Brother Giles, one of the Saint's first companions, one also of the most intuitive and intimate of his followers. To him while

resident in Florence came St Louis of France, then on pilgrimage, attracted by the beauty and sanctity of his character. They were strangers, never having met; and entering the house of the brothers unannounced the King inquired for Brother Giles, to whom presently the porter brought word that a pilgrim was waiting to see him.

"Then in great fervour" (says the chronicler), "Brother Giles left his cell and ran to the door; and there, albeit they had never met before, kneeling down with great devotion they embraced and kissed each other, with such signs of tender love as though they had long been close and familiar friends; but for all that they spoke not neither the one nor the other, but continued in those signs of love and tenderness to embrace silently. And when for a long while they had continued thus together without having spoken, they parted the one from the other; and St Louis went forward upon his journey and Brother Giles returned to his cell."

And when later, the name of the visitant being discovered, Brother Giles was reproached for having let so great a guest go without a word, he answered: "Marvel not, dear brothers, that we did not speak; for so soon as we looked upon each other we were at one, and gazing each into the other's heart we both knew—I what he would say to me, and he what I would say to him, far better than could be told by words."

It is a Franciscan story, and like many a Franciscan story it may not be historically true; but to those who know St Francis it stands as an emblem of what he did for the hearts of men, and of what he is himself even to-day—possessing the earth by his meekness even in a world that has rejected him.

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